



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



AH 4Z68 .

Harvard Depository
Brittle Book

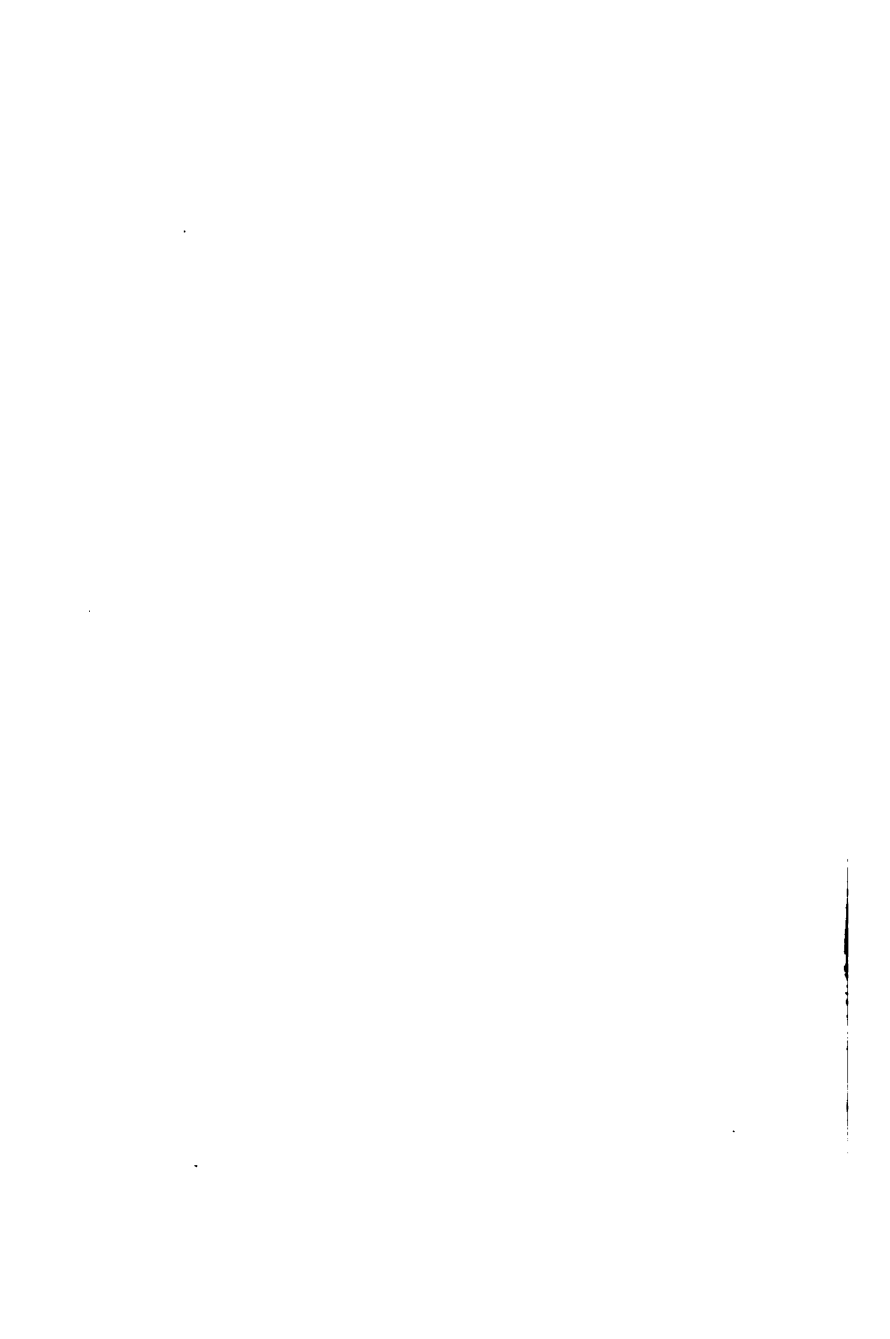


H.

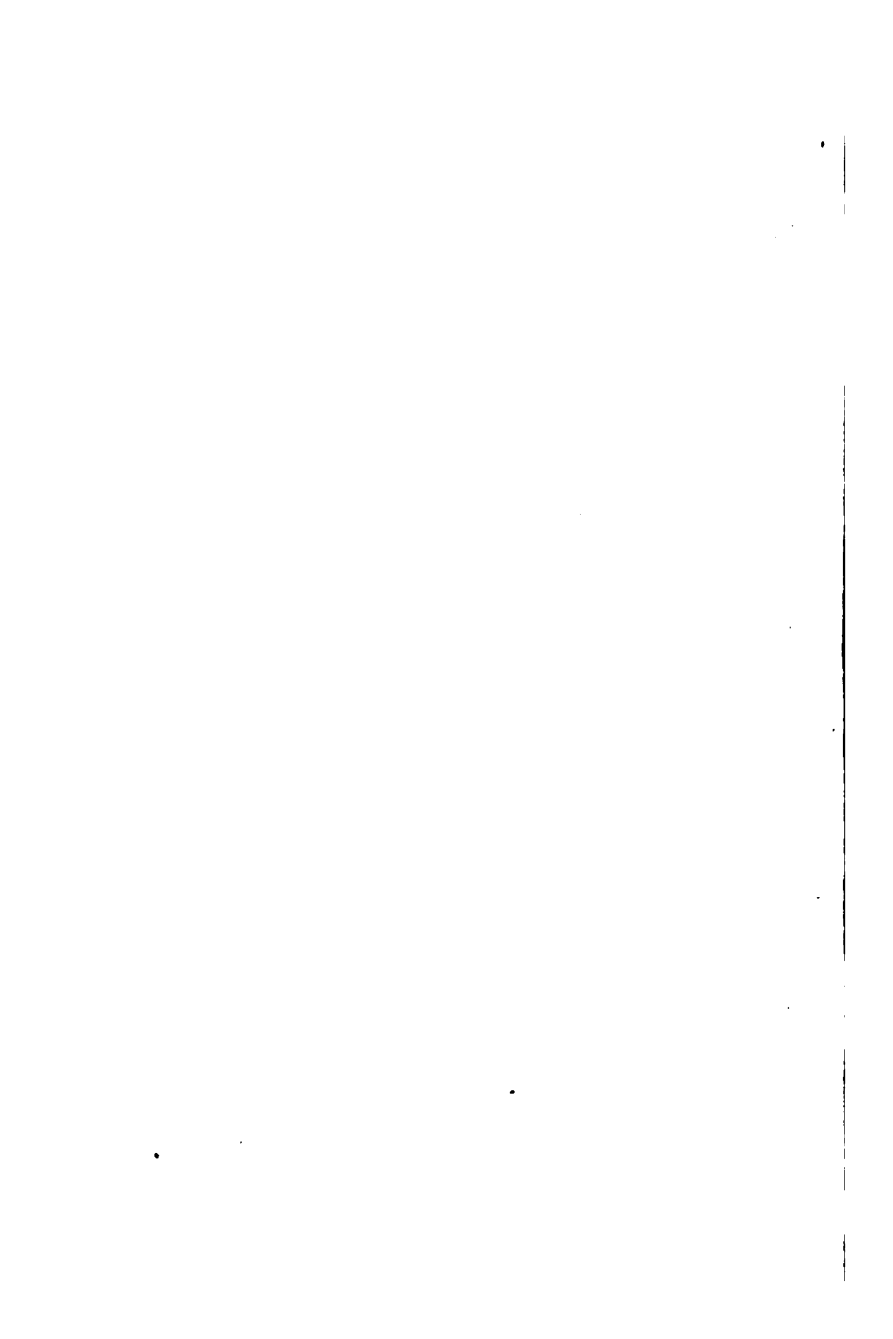
...

...

...



**The
Spiritual
Ascent**

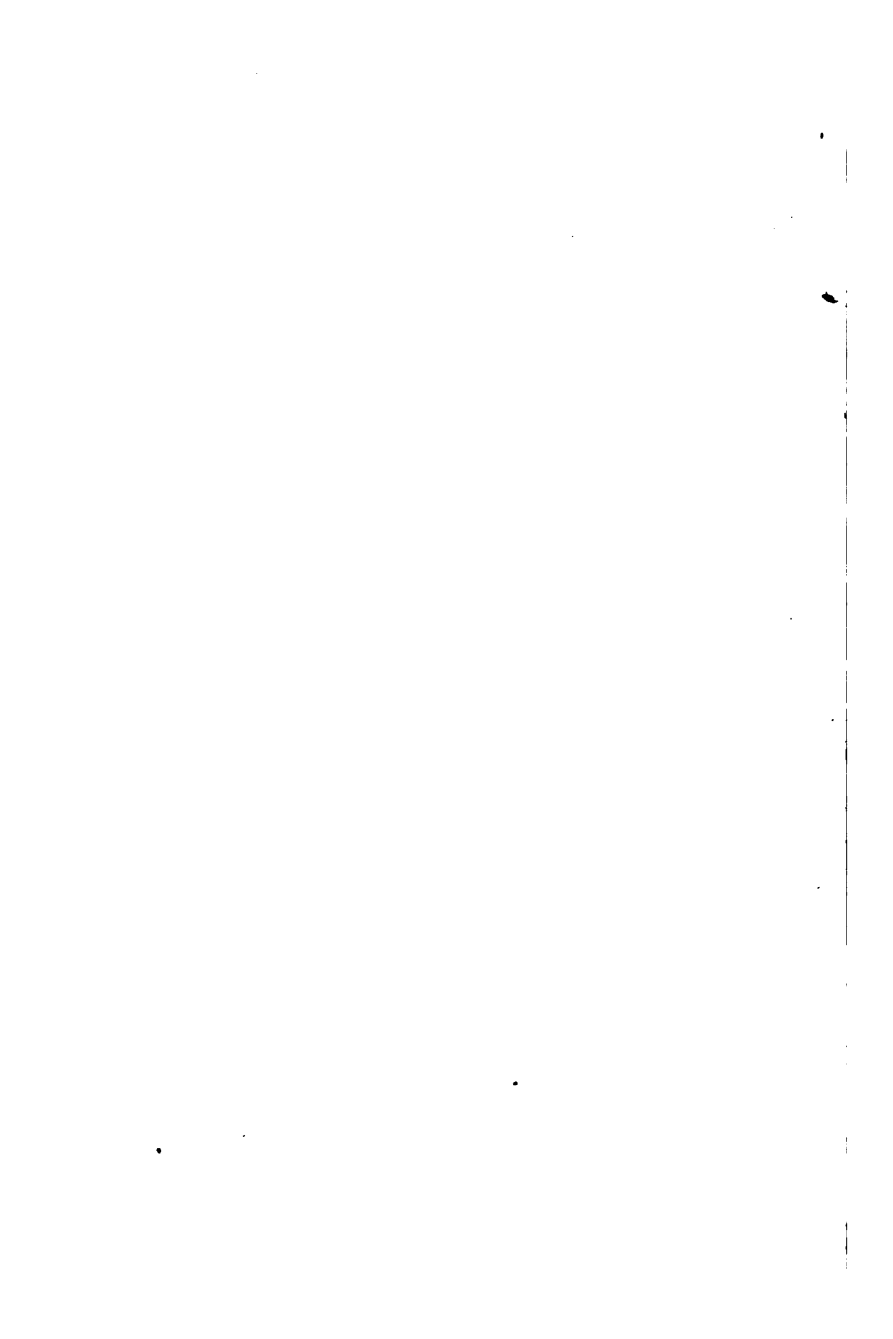


The Spiritual Ascent
A Devotional Treatise
By Gerard of
Zutphen



With a Life of the Author
By Thomas à Kempis

London: Burns & Oates
Orchard Street W
mcmviii



The Spiritual Ascent

A Devotional Treatise

By Gerard of

Zutphen



With a Life of the Author

By Thomas à Kempis

London: Burns & Oates

Orchard Street W

mcmviii

Nihil obstat

F. THOMAS BERGH, O.S.B.
Censor deputatus

Imprimatur



GULIELMUS

Episcopus Arindelensis

Vicarius Generalis

Westmonasterii

die 16 Maii, 1908

770.5
Z58sp
1905

v

The Translator's Note

THE life of Gerard Zerbolt, of Zutphen, which is here translated, forms one of a series of eleven lives of members of the association which developed into the Brotherhood of the Common Life. A translation into English of these short biographies, which were originally intended to be a part of the *Dialogus Novitiorum*, will be found in a volume entitled *The Founders of a New Devotion* [Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1905]. There is no doubt about the authenticity of the lives as the work of Thomas à Kempis, and the notice of Gerard of Zutphen has a special interest owing to the fact that à Kempis, who joined the school at Deventer in 1392, must have known the subject of this memoir. Lives of Amilius of Buren and Florentius Radewin, who are mentioned above, also find a place in à Kempis's collection; the former died in the year 1400 and the latter in 1404.

The treatise here translated is that mentioned by à Kempis as the book entitled *Blessed is the Man*, these being the opening words of the discourse: the other treatise beginning *A Certain Man* is so similar in character and arrangement to the work under consideration that the two may be considered as different versions of the same book; but that chosen for translation is, from a literary point of view, more harmonious, whilst *Homo quidam* is as it were the rough draft.

¶ The last chapter, which is for the instruction of novices, forms a separate tract, and is not really a part of *The Spiritual Ascent*.

J. P. ARTHUR

The Life of Gerard Zerbolt, of Zutphen, by Thomas à Kempis

1. I will now recount briefly the virtues of that devout and learned man Gerard of Zutphen, and as a good memorial of his life will set his example and his writings before the generations that are yet to be, as their pattern; for he hath deserved above all others to be named amongst our first brothers and those that were zealous for the law of God. Moreover, though he lived for but a short while, yet he left to us most grateful memorials of doctrine, for he was very studious in Holy Scripture and drew, even from dark sentences, divers kinds of aromatic wisdom, having virtue to quell the diseases of vice and to heal the languors of the soul. These do most chiefly appear in two little books that he put forth, of which the one beginneth *A Certain Man*, and the other is entitled *Blessed is the Man*. Now from his infancy and the years of his boyhood he was inclined toward learning, quick of genius, eager toward the liberal arts, and heartily averse from worldly business and from everything that might hinder the pursuit of wisdom.

2. And when he grew up to be a youth of good disposition he went to foreign schools to be the better instructed, and there he strove with all his might to be constant in attendance, to rise up early in the morning and to hasten in good time to hear the lectures. All the season of study seemed short to him, for he was ever desirous to gathersome yet more fruitful knowledge from the Master's lips, and this he would lay up carefully

viiij Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen

in the closet of his breast. So fiercely did his mind burn to make progress in knowledge that he was sad above measure when the masters did not lecture in the school, nay he even wept sometimes because on holidays there was no lecture, being ill-content that a day should go by barren of such fruit. His ingenuous mind was far removed from the sloth of dullards and the idle wandering of the wanton: for these do run about the streets taking their delight in foolish plays, they hate the school, and seldom visit a church: but Gerard pondered the purpose for which he had come and the reason for which schools were set up, wherefore he got him zealously to study and made progress so wisely as to deserve hereafter to become a scholar of the eternal wisdom when he had left scholastic knowledge. By the ordinance of GOD he came at length to the school of Deventer, and finding there the devout Brothers he clave firmly to Florentius and being now sufficiently instructed, he abandoned the tottering estate of this world for the sake of the love of CHRIST and his own salvation.

3. So being converted, he began to be diligent to amend and fervent to make progress: likewise to separate his thoughts from all entanglement with things temporal, and as a good eremite to love his cell, giving himself up to inward exercises and spending his hours in writing and study, so that many wondered because he was seldom seen to go forth and would not take solace out of doors. Yet had he for his greatest solace holy works, and sought the hallowed mansions of heaven instead of the spreading plains of earth. When he went across to the church he passed through the streets as if without noticing men: and being asked if he were not hindered by the

Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen ix

worldlings that went by he answered, "I think it is a herd of swine that passeth me in the road, what is it to me that they have the upright posture of men?" When he sat in his chamber he was so intent upon his work, his writing, reading and prayer, that often during the whole day he did not open his window, nor look without, albeit the weather might be fair enough.

4. And so it was that one of the Brothers said to him, "Why dost thou not open thy window? thou sittest here as if shut in a cellar, and it were good to breathe some fresh air"; but Gerard, being given up to zeal for discipline, made answer, "If I had leisure and knowledge to take such forethought, mayhap it were good so to do." Being asked what he thought when the bell rang for dinner, he replied, "As to one duty so go I to another"; he cared not at all what he ate, nor when the hour for refecton might be; and when need of food drove him, even then he hastened rather to hear the holy reading rather than to refresh his body, for he was without care for the body and gave thought rather to refreshing the powers of his soul, for which cause he would have soon destroyed his health and died but that Florentius was careful of his needs. Thus it fell out that he suffered in secret from the disease which physicians call "fistula," which he bore patiently for a long while, being unwilling that any should be burdened or spend money on him, for he desired to suffer pain in the body as a medicine for his soul. But when Florentius found this out he called a physician to take care of Gerard until he should be healed.

5. He was librarian and keeper of the books, in the collection and writing of which he showed great diligence. He lent many copies of holy

x Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen

books to clerks outside the house that they might have readings at home and in the schools, so as to avoid the telling of empty stories and idle wandering on feast days, for at these times clerks are specially admonished to be occupied with holy things. Furthermore, he was wont to say, "These books preach and teach better than we can by word of mouth; for holy books are the light and solace of our souls and the true medicine of life, and we cannot do without them, while we sojourn here, any more than we can dispense with the Sacraments of the Church." He loved the works of Holy Theology above all the riches of the world, and rejoiced more greatly over a well-writ copy than a sumptuous banquet or wine of excellent savour; for he knew that they shall not be wise who take their delight in dainty meats and drink, but they that are given over to the study of holy things shall be filled with wisdom and earn to be admitted to the secret things of Heaven. For this cause he held books in the greatest reverence, read in them with all diligence and kept them under careful ward.

6. Also many clerks came to him to resolve divers questions and doubtful matters, and did gladly hear his discourse, for he was a man learned and eloquent, proved by many exercises and one that had knowledge how to answer each. Florentius often called him to set in order the affairs of the House and consulted with him especially concerning matters which demanded skill in law and such as seemed to require spiritual treatment. Wherefore, if Gerard met with any weighty or deep matter, he reserved the same for the opinion and decision of the learned, when it was seemly to do thus; for he listened rever-

Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen xj

ently to doctors and ever followed the authority of the Saints without wavering, openly confirming what he said by sacred testimony. For this cause he was wondrously praised by wise and lettered men for the genius that was gathered in him, yet he himself accounted the praise of men as nothing. He was zealous not to be a follower of eloquence, but rather one that maintained a good conscience; and so in the interpretation of the Scriptures his long exercises of study therein helped him less than the informing grace of the Holy Spirit, who giveth understanding to little ones and doth reveal His mysteries to pure hearts. To the gaining of this purity Gerard directed all his exercises, imprinting the fear of GOD in those newly converted, chiding the sluggish, and exhorting them that desired to make progress in virtue to mortify their vices.

7. "If," said he, "we neglect to strive against vices, our passions will prevail and we shall fall into the snares of the devil who doth ever lie in wait on the road of our progress; wherefore we must labour with all diligence so as to fight manfully, for a crown of eternal glory hath been promised to him that overcometh."

After that he received the light, this priest walked humbly and devoutly amongst the Brothers having much grace with him, and albeit he had read many books, yet before the end of his life he began to read again the *Mirror for Monks* and the *Progress of the Religious* as though he were but newly converted, and by these books he strove to gather afresh the spirit of devotion and to renew himself to his first fervour. Yet kindled as he was with such a zeal for progress, he did not long survive, but mindful of Lubert, who was dead, he followed him after a short

xij Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen

space, for he had loved him very greatly and shed many tears at his death.

8. He had been sent with Brother Amilius to the Abbot at Dickeninghe, a man learned in Canon Law, with whom he was wont often to discuss cases of law; and turning aside he went to Wintlessem, but as he spent the night there he fell sick unto death. Then said Amilius to him, "It seemeth to me thou art near to die"; and Gerard made answer, "Soseemeth it to me also"; and so it was that his sickness grew upon him, and he breathed forth the breath of his life as one lapped in a gentle sleep, upon the night of the feast of St Barbara, the virgin, in the year of the LORD 1398, and in the thirty-first year of his age. His body was buried by the Prior and the Brothers, with deserved honour, in the path before the door of the church. But when Florentius heard of the death of the beloved Gerard, he was full of sorrow, and both he and all the Brothers with him wept with great lamentation, for superabundant love constrained them, because from them was taken a brother most dear who was a pillar of the House, and her other hand in the management of affairs.

But blessed be God, Who lent us such a man.

The Contents

The Translator's Note	Page v
The Life of Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen by Thomas à Kempis	Page vij
The Devout Treatise of Gerard of Zutphen, concerning the steps that lead upward in the Spiritual Life	Page i
Chapter I. Concerning five things needful for them that order themselves for progress in the Religious Life	1
Chapter II. Concerning the place and state of natural and primitive worthiness in which GOD did set man in the beginning, and concerning the many gifts which He gave to him.	4
Chapter III. Concerning the valley of tears to the which mankind hath fallen, through the lapse of the first man; also of the minishing of the powers of the soul and the ill-adjustment thereof which man hath incurred; and how this is the first lapse from our aforesaid state of uprightness	7
Chapter IV. How that mankind have not only departed from a state of uprightness through the fall of the first man, but also have gone very far to impurity of heart, being beguiled by their concupiscence; the nature of this impurity of heart, and how this is the second lapse	9
Chapter V. Of the third downfall of man, namely, by mortal sin, by the which he hath gone very far off, to a land of estrangement	12
Chapter VI. Of the three examinations; and how it is chiefly by the remembrance of sin that a man doth regain his senses to perceive that his last downgoing was through mortal sin	12
Chapter VII. Of the second examination by the which a man doth bestir himself concerning his whole state, both inward and outward, and through which he cometh to this point that he doth perceive his first downward step, and the minishing of the powers of his soul	16
Chapter VIII. Of the third examination, by which a man doth bestir himself out of his daily excesses: for by this doth he learn discernment concerning purity of heart; and also of the discovery of the passions	18

Chapter IX. How that before he doth make an upward step a man ought first of all to determine in his heart what his spiritual exercises should be, and to commune with some spiritually minded man as to the same; and how that holy exercises are not to be changed lightly, but that one must persevere in them until he reach the end	20
Chapter X. How that a man ought to order this in his heart in one way as regardeth the end, but in another in regard to the means leading to that end	22
Chapter XI. Of the three upward steps which overcome the three falls afore mentioned, and do lead us back to a state of uprightness. After this it remaineth to speak in the discourse following of the upward steps by which thou oughtest to ascend and return	24
Chapter XII. Of the first ascent against mortal sin; the three steps of this ascent; and of contrition	24
Chapter XIII. Of Confession, which is the second step of this ascent	26
Chapter XIV. Of Satisfaction, which is the third step of the first ascent	27
Chapter XV. Here beginneth the second ascent, which overcometh the second descent, whereby a man doth return to purity; and how that uncleanness of heart consisteth in three things, to overcome which three a man goeth upward also in this second ascent by three steps	28
Chapter XVI. Of the first step of this ascent, which consisteth in fear; in this step our heart is by fear withdrawn from hurtful affections and attachments	30
Chapter XVII. How Compunction which is born of fear may be brought about in various and divers manners by exercises and by meditation	32
Chapter XVIII. How that Compunction is profitable; and of the manner in which it doth purify the heart	33
Chapter XIX. A general method to be used for shaping meditations about death	34
Chapter XX. General thoughts on the Last Judgement by which a man may strike terror into himself	37
Chapter XXI. How that a man, by remembering the pains of hell, doth get Dread and Compunction	39
Chapter XXII. Of the second step of the second ascent, which is through Hope and yearning for things heavenly and spiritual, by which a man is purged and made whole of the second impurity of heart	42
Chapter XXIII. Of Compunction through love and how a man shall exercise himself therein	44

The Contents

xv

Chapter XXIV. A general method of moulding one's meditations concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, so as to have Compunction and a desire to reach that Kingdom	46
Chapter XXV. How that a man, by being mindful of the benefits that GOD hath done him, is inflamed in devotion and kindled to Compunction	47
Chapter XXVI. Here beginneth the treatise concerning the third step of this ascent, which is in Charity and Purity of heart (for in these doth this ascent consist), and how a man may know when he is come to this step of Purity and Charity	51
Chapter XXVII. Of the three steps of the ascent which overcome the third impurity; by these, each in his order, is a man so disposed as to be able to cleave more perfectly to GOD	54
Chapter XXVIII. Of the types and prophecies in the Scriptures concerning the Incarnation of CHRIST	60
Chapter XXIX. Concerning the Annunciation	60
Chapter XXX. The Life of CHRIST in brief until the Supper	61
Chapter XXXI. Of the LORD's Supper	64
Chapter XXXII. Concerning the LORD's Passion and of the three ways in which a man ought to exercise himself thereon	72
Chapter XXXIII. The Passion of CHRIST set forth in brief, and divided into portions.	
<i>The First Portion.</i>	80
Chapter XXXIV. The Passion of CHRIST.	
<i>The Second Portion.</i> He was led to the house of Caiaphas, where the scribes and priests were waiting for Him	82
Chapter XXXV. The Passion of CHRIST.	
<i>The Third Portion.</i> But as JESUS stood in most lowly fashion before Pilate the Governor, a great tumult and mighty clamour roared around Him, as the Jews themselves cried out: "Crucify Him, crucify Him; we have a law, and by our law He ought to die," and so forth. Then did Pilate order Him to be most cruelly scourged over His whole body; and as if He had unlawfully called Himself a king, He was mocked with much derision, being clothed in kingly garb and wearing a royal cloak; His head was crowned with thorns, and grievously smitten with a reed; in mockery He was adored upon bended knees, as though he were a king	84
Chapter XXXVI. The Passion of CHRIST.	
<i>The Fourth Portion.</i> When He had been led to the Mount	

of Calvary, the liſtors began to ſet themſelves to crucify Him, to ſtrip Him of His veſture, and ſo forth with each ſeveral matter 85

Chapter XXXVII. The Paſſion of CHRIST.

The Fifth Portion. They brake the bones and the legs of the thieves, but not a bone of CHRIST was broken, that prophecy might be thoroughly fulfilled. But one of ſoldiers pierced his ſide, whence came forth blood and water, and conſecrated the ſacraments of the Church. The veil of the Temple was rent, the graves of the dead were opened, that on the day of the Reſurrection they might riſe thence with CHRIST 87

Chapter XXXVIII. Of the manner in which the devout man, in making his aſcents, ought to direct his thoughts to the Paſſion of CHRIST, ſo that he may go up by means of fear, make progress by means of hope, cleave to GOD by means of charity, and have his underſtanding enlightened 87

Chapter XXXIX. Of the Reſurrection of the LORD 90

Chapter XL. Of the glorious Aſcenſion of CHRIST 91

Chapter XLI. Of the miſſion of the HOLY SPIRIT 92

Chapter XLII. How that in this life we cannot accompliſh perfectly any of the three ſteps aforeſaid 92

Chapter XLIII. Of the three things by which the ſpiritual aſcent is maintained and moved forward, that is to ſay, reading, meditation and prayer 93

Chapter XLIV. The manner in which holy reading doth help and ſuſtain them that are upon the upward way, and how it muſt be ordered and directed towards ſpiritual progress 95

Chapter XLV. Of the manner of meditation 98

Chapter XLVI. Concerning prayer, and the manner of praying 101

Chapter XLVII. Here beginneth the third aſcent by which, through fighting down vices, we go upward from virtue to virtue, and form again thoſe powers of our ſoul which had abandoned it; and eſpecially of two things which do hinder them that go up the ſpiritual aſcent 106

Chapter XLVIII. How vices do attack the powers of the ſoul, and hinder him that goeth upward on the ſpiritual way 107

Chapter XLIX. How ſome do leave their vices and get them to divers ſpiritual exerciſes; and of the origin of affection 109

Chapter L. Of the three things needful to them that

The Contents xvii

would strive in lawful wise against vices, namely, strenuousness, staid gravity and benignity	113
Chapter LI. How that it is expedient or necessary for a man who is going forward in spiritual exercises to have for a guide a man that is spiritual	114
Chapter LII. How that he who fighteth against the eight capital vices, doth in a manner strive against all inordinate affections	115
Chapter LIII. Of the manner of fighting against vices, and how that a man ought not to fight against all at one time, but against some one chief vice	116
Chapter LIV. How that one must fight against vices in different ways corresponding to the diversity of their nature; and of that in which this diversity doth consist	119
Chapter LV. How there be three ascents to overcome each vice, that is three ways of going forward to the opposite virtue	120
Chapter LVI. Of the upgoing which overcometh the first vice which is gluttony	121
Chapter LVII. Of the upgoings whereby one must fight down the vice of luxury	125
Chapter LVIII. Of the upgoings that overcome avarice	128
Chapter LIX. The ascents to overcome wrath	129
Chapter LX. The ascents that lead to love of one's neighbour and to the overcoming of envy	130
Chapter LXI. The ascents whereby we overcome and cast out accidie	133
Chapter LXII. How we go upward against vainglory to put it out	137
Chapter LXIII. Of the ascents whereby we should war against pride	139
Chapter LXIV. Here beginneth the fourth part, which concerneth the spiritual descents, which are divided into two: the first the descent to oneself, the second that to one's neighbour	143
Chapter XLV. Of the first descent by which a man goeth down, out of regard for himself, from a higher to a lower step	144
Chapter XLVI. Of the second descent by which a man must go down by times to learn discipline in his outward conduct and bearing	146
Chapter LXVII. The third descent, so far as it referreth to oneself. In this a man must needs exercise himself in the labour of his hands, seeing that for his	

frailty he cannot always nor long continue in spiritual exercises 148

Chapter LXVIII. Of the descents in regard to, or on behalf of, one's neighbour; of which the first is made at the bidding of our Superior 153

Chapter LXIX. Concerning the second descent in regard to our neighbour, by the which we do condescend to him, by giving either aid, counsel, admonition or correction 154

Chapter LXX. Of the third descent by which it is needful that a Superior go down, through care and solitude for those that are set under him 158

Concerning four things in which they who are beginning to serve GOD must be cautious if they would make progress Page 161

Here beginneth the devout treatise of Gerard of Zutphen concerning the steps that lead upward in the Spiritual Life; which treatise is not less needful than profitable to all them that desire to make progress in that life

¶ Chapter I. Concerning five things needful for them that order themselves for progress in the Religious Life.

BLESSED *is the man whose help is from Thee;* Bin the valley of tears he hath set in his heart steps upward to the place that he hath before him.

I know, O man, that thou art desirous to go upward, and that thou dost long earnestly to be lifted up, for thou art a creature reasonable and noble, endowed with a certain greatness of mind, wherefore thou dost seek lofty heights and an ascent thereto by reason of a desire that is of thy nature; nor is this appetite a thing to be chidden, so that it be ordered duly, that is to say, so that thou desire to go upward to the height of thine original worthiness, longing to get thee gone out of the valley of tears and wretchedness. Yet to get thee thence and thither to ascend is this alone, namely, to go forward in the heart by means of the upward ways and steps of virtue. For in proportion as thou dost go forward in thine heart, in that measure dost thou ascend; and as thou failest herein, in that measure dost thou descend. For this cause thou must order thine upgoing in thy heart, yet trust not that thou shalt go upward by thine own virtue, but dwell continually in the help of the Most High, and abide in the protection of the GOD of Heaven. If thus thou dost ascend, it is a laudable thing, for blessed art thou: the reputation of one that doeth valiantly shall be thy portion; and by this means shalt

2 The Spiritual Ascent

thou get for thy guerdon everlasting blessedness and glory that shall abide without end.

When thou orderest thyself to climb upward, there are set before thee these five things, though their order is reversed, which things are expressed in prophecy, and though the words be few yet is the meaning thereof full.

The first thing is the place to the which thou must ascend, the place namely which GOD hath ordained. This may we fitly understand to be the state of thy natural uprightness, in which GOD did of old place thee and create thee. Wherefore thou must order in thine heart an upward way to that place from the which thou hast in like manner gone downward.

The second thing is the place from the which thou must get thee forth by this upgoing, that is to say the valley of tears, and this valley is, by a fitting interpretation, the casting out and loss of thy natural worthiness: here, lying as in a deep cleft, thou must return by the upward way to the mountain whence thou art fallen.

The third thing signified to thee is the means by the which thou must prepare thyself to go up, for thou oughtest to set in order the upward steps in thy heart by considering diligently therein, before that thou dost begin the ascent, the means and exercises by which thou dost desire to attain to thy former state; and the purpose of this is that, by so taking thought beforehand in thine heart, thou mayest determine by what exercises thou canst the better recover thy lost worthiness. Now this ascent is not compassed by thy running nor by thy climbing, but is of the gift of the pitiful GOD: wherefore in the fourth place the counsel given to thee is this, namely, that thou must ask aid and help from the LORD; for thine own dili-

Of Five Things Needful 3

gence is nothing save the grace of the LORD attend thee in all things.

But lest thou shouldest fall backward again affrighted by the difficulty of this upward way, and overcome by the toil thereof, a reward is promised thee, wherefore it is said, "Blessed is the man"; seeing that thou art blessed indeed if so be thou dost make progress in the upgoing of thine heart. Here the blessedness lieth in hope, but afterward it shall be in very deed; here thou hast the blessing of a way of life that is set in virtue and justice, there thou shalt have the blessing of thine own country. In sooth, if thou shalt have virtue and justice, thou hast therewith as it were thy future blessedness, since thou dost possess as I may say the very cause thereof. For as the world of nature doth in itself, by its productive force and its propagating virtue, contain the power to produce a certain effect, so also future blessedness and eternal felicity are the comrades of virtue and justice.

Wherefore remember for a little whence thou must ascend, and whither. Formerly thou wast set upon the lofty mountain of thy natural and primitive worthiness, whence by thine own will thou art fallen into a deep valley; therefore from this must thou get thee forth, and climb upward by little and little to the mountain from the which thou art fallen. But or ever thou dost begin to go upward thou oughtest to set up ladders in thine heart, and put in order the means of thy progress by the which thou mayest be able the better to reach the place thou seekest. But seeing that thou art yet at the foot of the ladder, and the ascent is before thee; seeing that thy strength faileth and thou knowest the height to which thou must go, thou oughtest to reach up thine hand to the LORD

4 The Spiritual Ascent

Who doth lean upon the top of the ladder, and cry to Him: "Draw me near to Thee." So shalt thou be blessed, and shalt enjoy everlasting felicity.

But all these things shall be set forth more clearly, one by one, in the words that do follow.

¶ Chapter II. Concerning the place and state of natural and primitive worthiness in which GOD did set man in the beginning, and concerning the many gifts which He gave to him.

IF then the LORD hath set in order in thine heart this upward way, and hath stirred thee to make the spiritual ascent, and if the desire of thy mind be this, namely, to hasten on thy way, before all things thou oughtest to be assured concerning thy descent or fall, that by this means thou mayest know that thou must climb upward again from the place to which (as thou seest) thou art fallen miserably; and perceive that thy task is to return from the valley of tears to that place in which GOD set thee, and for which He ordained thee.

• Wherefore consider diligently that the LORD GOD Who created thee after His image and similitude placed thee of old on so lofty a height of worthiness and set thee upon so high a mountain of natural gifts and graces that scarce couldst thou have ascended higher unless thou hadst gone forward to the essential vision of GOD; thou wast placed indeed in a paradise of delight, filled without and within with all good things; without thou mightest have enjoyed a place of pleasantness and the delights of pleasure, and within thou wast filled with knowledge of things and with a quiet and peaceful concord of thine affections: for the LORD most bountiful had given

Natural and Primitive Worthiness 5

to thee powers of understanding or recognition, namely, intelligence, reason and perception, and this to the end that through thine intelligence thou mightest know God, and apprehend things not material; through thy lower reason discern rightly between lower things, and ascribe all to His glory: that through thine outward sense thou mightest discern the particulars and presence before thee of things material and by thine inward sense call up to thy mind the images and similitude of such things, even when they are not present, through the help of reason.

He gave thee, likewise, powers of appetite, such as will, to the end that thou mightest love God above all, and other things for His sake; and that in loving them thou mightest ascribe them duly to Him.

He gave thee, also, the power concupiscent, that thou mightest seek every good thing, and the Sovereign Good above all. In this power concupiscent He set desires and delectable affections, namely, that of love, to the end that love itself of its own motion might urge and incline thee to the good; also that of joy, that thou mightest take thy chief delight in God, rejoicing in the perception of His benefits and in the contemplation of His works and wonders and so forth.

He gave thee the power irascible, by the which thou mightest cleave closely to God, and cast off with indignation aught that might be able to divide thee from Him. In this also He included the delectable affections that are proper thereto, hope and courage, that thou mightest quit thee manfully in coming near to the good and mightest hope to attain thereto. See, then, how many good things He gave to thee, and on how lofty a

6 The Spiritual Ascent

mountain height He set thee. Man's understanding was illumined, so that our first parent perceived God through the pure perception of his mind and the power of contemplation that went forth therefrom, though, as we believe, he did not see Him in His very essence. He implanted in thee no passion or affection that was evil, that is to say none of those affections, such as hatred and sadness, whose aim is toward evil or lead directly thereto; and the purpose of this was that nothing might disturb thee inwardly. Nor were those powers, capacities and affections contrary the one to the other in such a manner that the law of the flesh warred against the law of the mind; for not yet was the body corrupted, wherefore it laid not a heavy burden upon the soul.

But God had ordained these powers in thee in most excellent wise, so that the lower obeyed the higher without contradiction and without any desire to go contrary thereto; for sense was subject to reason, and reason to mind, but the mind herself must have been subject to God only. The appetite of the senses, that is the powers concupiscent and irascible, rendered most ready obedience to the will and to the appetite of reason; thus in the inner man there was complete concord, and whatever the will herself did desire, in this did the other inferior powers and affections obey her. But the function of the will was to act upon the counsels of the understanding and the bidding of reason; and the understanding fully discerned what must be done or left undone as it were by natural illumination that was freely given to it, because the light of the countenance of the LORD did shine over it: and the peaceful concord and harmonious obe-

Natural and Primitive Worthiness 7

dience of the powers and affections after this manner was called and named by the saints "Original Justice."

Behold, O man, this was the place in which the LORD thy GOD set thee, this was the state of uprightness in which He created thee, and He hath ordained in thy heart a desire to ascend thereto. Consider this state of uprightness which thou dost represent still, as in a figure, by the upright posture of thy body, although in thy heart thou hast wandered very far away from it, as shall be said forthwith, and do thou say, with tears: "The feet of our affections were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem."

¶ Chapter III. Concerning the valley of tears to the which mankind hath fallen through the lapse of the first man; also of the minishing of the powers of the soul and the ill-adjustment thereof which man hath incurred; and how this is the first lapse from our aforesaid state of uprightness.

THIS hast thou heard concerning the place in the which GOD set thee, and to which thou must ascend again; now consider the valley of tears into which thou art gone down and fallen. Woe is me that our first created parent being raised aloft in so great glory and honour, though he was in that honourable state yet perceived it not, but transgressing the divine commandment turned him away from obedience to his Creator; wherefore he fell grievously, and we all in him. For we all were in him, by virtue of the force of parenthood, and the law of descent, wherefore we all are fallen, and, as saith Bernard, "We are fallen together into the mire, and upon a heap of stones"; thus it is that we all are defiled together with original guilt and likewise dashed

8 The Spiritual Ascent

together, broken and grievously wounded in all the powers and forces of a soul whose nature, as aforesaid, was once most excellently disposed. Moreover, original justice being lost by this very fall, and by the just judgement of God, our powers and affections, having lapsed from their former state, are alike minished and disordered; yet are they not wholly destroyed, but being impelled in a direction contrary to their former inclination, they do oppose and strive the one against the other in their motions and impulses. This very thing thou shalt find out every day, I might almost say continuously, unless thou art altogether deprived of understanding, namely, that carnal affections (that is the powers concupiscent and irascible) are rebellious against the will and contrary thereto, whilst the will herself doth often act against reason though she be not beyond it. From this it cometh that now these powers and affections are inclined in a direction far removed from that to which God ordained them, being prone to evil and rushing headlong to the desire of that which is unlawful. Nay, moreover, reason herself having become blind, wandering and dull, doth often take falsehood for truth, and immesh herself in unprofitable and curious matters. The will is become crooked, doth often choose the worse part and loveth carnal things, making light of things spiritual and heavenly. The concupiscent power is disordered, and hath fallen through some impulse or other to the lusts of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and carnal pleasures, that is to gluttony, luxury and avarice. The irascible power is ill adjusted, and fallen to the pride of life and worldly glory. Hope doth not exercise herself upon God, but upon riches, or her own merits; or her trust is either greater or less than

Of the Valley of Tears 9

is right. We are sad at the loss of riches and at the contempt of the world; we rejoyce over gluttony and luxury; we are wroth with our brother. In a word, through the loss of original justice, all our affections are prone to evil from youth upward, nay from their very conception. This is because the soul herself doth contract from the flesh, which is born of concupiscence, this burning flame and desire which is an inclination to evil. Verily CHRIST, by His most precious death, hath redeemed us from original guilt, so that this minishing of our powers and the law of the flesh are not now guilt, seeing that we cannot but partake thereof, so that there is no condemnation to them that are in CHRIST JESUS; yet He hath by no means restored us to our original state of uprightness nor recast the powers of our soul, but hath left them to us to be recast through holy exercises that we should practise these and earn merit.

See, this is the valley of tears, namely, the state of misery into which we are fallen and from which we must order in our heart an ascent whereby to rise therefrom, so as afterward to go up thereby.

¶ Chapter IV. How that mankind have not only departed from a state of uprightness through the fall of the first man, but also have gone very far to impurity of heart, being beguiled by their concupiscence; the nature of this impurity of heart, and how this is the second lapse.

MIGHTY in truth and mighty above measure is the distance between the valley of tears wherein thou art now set and the mount on which of old the LORD placed thee, namely, the state of thine uprightness; wherefore a mighty ascent is needful to thee, and of a verity many

efforts to go upward; likewise thou must toil mightily if thou wilt return thither. Would that thou mightest have continued here, and here made thine abiding place nor have fallen any further; but, alas! O son, who hast wasted thy substance upon divers harlots—that is to say, thou hast been drawn by the enticements of thy concupiscence to a place yet much further off; verily, as saith the Holy Gospel, thou art gone away into a very far country, led thither by thy lusts, and hast committed fornication with harlots, that is with these same. For as often as we are concupiscent, so often (as saith Jerome) do we commit fornication; and thus thou hast spent all thy wealth and that portion of natural and freely-given goods that had fallen to thee. So it is that through the fall of the first man, as hath been said already, we have gotten a disposition in our desires toward the lowest things, and thus, except we resist them continually, we are constrained by their impulse to descend yet lower; but thou hast not only failed to resist them by inclining thyself thereto, but hast descended therewith and clung to lusts, to carnal affections and to earthly things, on which account whatever disposition to good had heretofore remained to thee this hast thou lost, whether that disposition did proceed from natural or spiritual gifts. Furthermore, by cleaving in thy desires and affections to things that are vile, after this fashion, thou art become as it were conformed to and of like nature with them; and thus hast thou gotten as it were a sort of filth and clinging defilement in thy desires and powers, being hampered by which as if by a viscous and slimy substance thou art held in yet lower place; and by this is meant thine own impurity of heart. Now, in the

Of the Fall of Man

11

case of natural substances, things are called and become impure through being intermingled with baser matter: gold, for example, doth become impure if it be mixed with silver, or silver if it be mixed with lead; and after this same manner thy reasonable soul, O man, which is worth more than all temporal creatures, doth gather impurity and uncleanness from this cause, namely, that through lust she is become subject to things, for the affections and desires, being set on these, have grown accustomed thereto, and are besmeared thereby; wherefore, in like manner, the soul becometh defiled and unclean. And if by reason of the carnal affections the soul hath clung to things carnal, it doth gather that certain defilement which is called carnality, through which man doth become carnal; but if through worldly affection she hath clung to worldly things and to vanities, the defilement is called vanity, and by this doth man become worldly; and so it is that Holy Scripture doth distinguish between men that are carnal and men that are worldly.

Behold thou dost perceive what is impurity of heart, about which thou readest in the Scripture, but perhaps thou dost not understand. This verily is that affection through which thou art inordinately inclined to the lowest things and cleavest thereto, and whether thou art drawn thereby to gluttony, or to luxury, to vainglory, or to pride, or to the praise of men, the affection is called impurity of heart. This impurity thou hast gotten through the fall of the first man; but by thine own continuance therein, by thine own affection and cleaving to it, thou hast added much more thereto, so that he that was foul at the first is now become yet fouler.

The Spiritual Ascent

Lo! this is thy second lapse, and the further thou hast fallen the greater need hast thou of more upgoings that thou mayest be able to return to the state of uprightness.

¶ Chapter V. Of the third downfall of man, namely, by mortal sin, by the which he hath gone very far off to a land of estrangement.

BUT not yet doth the prodigal son cease to go even further off and to perish yet more utterly; for the further one doth go away the more utterly doth he perish who departeth turning away from God. Why should I say more? When all his substance hath been wasted upon harlots, he cometh to a land of estrangement where he doth hire himself out to one of the citizens of that country who setteth him to feed his swine. That is, in a word, by mortal sin he doth subject himself to the devil and in all things indulgeth the impulses of his desires and lusts.

See, O man, now art thou come to the land of estrangement wherein is not seen one trace of virtue. These be the three downfalls by the which thou hast descended very far into the land of estrangement from the state of uprightness.

¶ Chapter VI. Of the three examinations; and how it is chiefly by the remembrance of sin that a man doth regain his senses to perceive that his last downgoing was through mortal sin.

AFTER that thou hast seen thy downgoings, it is fitting that thou shouldest set in order the manner of thine uprisings; but inasmuch as blindness and insensibility do often bear sin company, so that one who is overweighed thereby doth not at the time perceive that he is a sinner, but is dull of understanding; and seeing also that the bold bearing of the harlot and

Of the Remembrance of Sin 13

hardness of heart are engendered in him so that he no longer feareth God nor regardeth men, therefore, before thou dost make thine ascent, thou oughtest diligently to arouse thyself, and in every way that is within thy reach to strive to recover thy sensibility, to the end that thou mayest perceive what thy downward course hath been, and bewail thy sins. Therefore, that thou mayest know how great hath been thy grievous fall through this last step downwards—that is to say, through actual mortal sin—and how thou art gone away from the place in which thou wast set when thou hadst a nature unpoluted and not yet made evil, to this end, I say, thou oughtest diligently to arouse thyself and make strict examination, so that at length thou mayest open thine eyes, and be able to see whither thou hast fallen and where thou liest. Wherefore judge thyself strictly and do this often if not continually, first of all setting this before thee and meditating thereon, namely, how greatly each sin of thine is displeasing to God, how greatly He doth abhor and detest it. In order that thou mayest be able the better to perceive this, ponder diligently, and until thou dost inwardly apprehend it earnestly consider that pride was so displeasing to God that He did not spare His creature whom once He made the noblest of all, but cast him (namely Lucifer) forth from Heaven; think, then, will He spare thee because forsooth thou art better or nobler?

Consider how for disobedience He cast Adam forth from Paradise, and despoiled all mankind of original justice.

For luxury He overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the Flood drowned almost all the world; and many things like to these doth the

Holy Scripture set before thee. Consider that sin was so displeasing to GOD, that He was willing to make satisfaction for it by His own death, and that He could not let it go unpunished by reason of His own law of justice. But if thou art so hard of heart that this consideration doth not yet make thee fear thy fall, set before thee this thought and deal earnestly therewith, namely, that Divine Justice cannot judge otherwise than as thy works deserve. For GOD is a principle of equity which may be understood, a principle not to be turned aside nor altered, awarding punishment to evil not less surely than glory to good men. Wherefore be thou well assured that He shall recompense thee according to thy works, nor leave any evil in thee unpunished. So if thou dost consider the matter in thine heart after this fashion, I do not believe but that thou shalt be smitten with fear and overwhelmed with horror.

Then, in the third place, recollection should come and bring forward into the midst all thy grievous sins of the past, and above all the chiefest of them. Consider how many sins thou hast committed; for on almost every day and in every hour before thy conversion thou didst err grievously. Who shall tell the tale of the sins thou didst commit in thy heart, with thy mouth and in thine acts? Then take each one severally, and see how grievous are those offences by the which thou hast offended GOD Almighty, the terrible Judge, the Father kind and bountiful, Who hath done so great things for thee and hath sustained thee; and how in a manner that thou hast crucified Him afresh. After this, turn over in thy mind the thought how foul some of these sins are, and especially how greatly they have

Of the Remembrance of Sin 15

led thee to carnal things. But these oughtest thou to deal with more briefly, lest if thou linger over them some unclean delight creep in. Moreover, although thou art now converted to the LORD, yet deal not lightly with this recollection of thine offences, but add to the former task this that thou deal also in all diligence with those sins thou hast committed since thy conversion. Think of each vice with which thou art defiled already, and in particular of thy pride, how high it is; how greatly thou dost desire honour, lusting for praise, and aspiring to lofty station. Consider in what lukewarm and unfruitful wise thou hast spent all these years in GOD's service, how that thou canst scarce discern any progress, and how that it may be that GOD shall punish thee yet more grievously for those sins which thou hast done since thy conversion, seeing that in them thou hast been the more thankless.

Then having made examination into those things in thy thoughts, next ponder diligently upon the little satisfaction thou hast given for all these sins, how slight hath been thy contrition, how few and unsatisfying thy deeds; for be well assured that either here or hereafter thou shalt pay all, yea, to the uttermost farthing. But hereafter, according to Bernard, thou shalt pay an hundredfold, whilst here thou mightest pay once only. Wherefore, when the sinner shall have pondered in his thoughts these and such like things, and shall have perceived that he is smitten with fear and overwhelmed with inward grief, then let him humbly turn his heart that is filled with sorrow directly to his GOD by making prayer to Him, imploring His goodness and mercy with all yearning, promising to change his life and amend his behaviour, and fulfilling that promise

by the help of God. Yet oughtest thou to direct this method of meditation, or one like to it, in such a manner that thou fall not into despair, but be set on fire to give satisfaction and make amendment, to the end that thou mayest become ready for every toil, and to bear all infirmities.

¶ Chapter VII. Of the second examination by the which a man doth bestir himself concerning his whole state, both inward and outward, and through which he cometh to this point that he doth perceive his first downward step, and the minishing of the powers of his soul.

BUT in order that thou mayest the better apprehend the nature of thy first fall and downward step which was through Adam, and the minishing of the powers of thy soul; and further in order that thou mayest perceive more clearly the nature of all vices and passions in general, thou oughtest sometimes and at fitting opportunity to bestir thyself in another manner also, and to make earnest examination concerning thy whole state. Wherefore, in the first place, diligently examine thine inner man; see to what end the powers of thy soul incline thee, and how far that end is from what they ought to seek—or how near thereto—or whether they fulfil the end for which, as thou hast heard before, they were given thee of God. Examine thy reason; consider whether it be not astray in many things, whether it be not curious and occupied with vanities, leaving things that are wholesome; whether it be not deceived, trusting in its own determinations, not consenting to lowly things, and so becoming stubborn; whether it be not proud, believing itself to be somewhat, though it be nothing, preferring itself above its betters,

Of Examining One's State 17

unwilling to be taught by others, intractable, disobedient, incapable of good counsels.

Next examine thy memory; see what manner of meditation hath been thine most often; for that which thou dost love or fear most, upon that dost thou most often ponder.

Then examine thine appetites; consider by what thou art made sad, by what thou art disturbed, in what thou dost rejoice and take thy pleasure; what thou dost hope and what thou hatest; then shalt thou see clearly how far thou art fallen.

See what manner of brute beasts are wont to have the mastery over thy powers concupiscent, whether they be those of gluttony, luxury or avarice; what ravening creatures prowl about thy powers irascible, for perchance there is the lion of pride, the dog of wrath, the basilisk of envy.

Next examine thine outward man, for the unbridled inclinations of the outer point to an inner man that is disordered. Consider whether thou dost not often exceed in harsh words, in detraction and flattery, in levity, vain talking and much speaking; also and above all consider whether thou dost keep charity with all men, or whether thou dost sometimes do hurt to the conscience of others by giving scandal, by restlessness or by the presumptuousness of strange behaviour.

Consider also whether thou art burning with zeal to admonish others in charitable wise and to chide them in humility; also whether thou art earnest faithfully to fulfil the work committed to thee. Likewise examine thyself concerning reading, meditation, prayer, and so forth with other things, as to thy dispositions in regard to each one and the manner in which thou art wont to order them.

18 The Spiritual Ascent

¶ Chapter VIII. Of the third examination, by which a man doth bestir himself out of his daily excesses: for by this doth he learn discernment concerning purity of heart; and also of the discovery of the passions.

BUT to the end that thou mayest be able to perceive thy second downward step, that namely by which thou hast gotten impurity of heart, being led away by thine own concupiscence, thou oughtest to make yet a third examination into thy state. This should be done daily, and as Bernard doth advise, for the most part after Compline, for at that time on every day thou must diligently look backward and strictly consider how often thou hast been drawn to things unlawful through thine evil habits, and above all how often that viscous and clinging impurity hath hampered thee during the day; as, for example, hast thou been led to contemplate things unlawful, to vain thoughts during thy prayers, to the utterance of idle or hurtful words, or on that day through negligence hast thou omitted holy meditation? or being overcome of thine own impurity, hast thou been without impulse to good? Likewise consider whether, being drawn by habit which hath grown up in thee, thou hast afforded to temptation a means of approach, and hast not rejected or resisted it. If thou art diligent in telling thy hoard in these three ways severally and dost pass sentence as a just judge, tearing away the veil of self-love and of partiality so as not to favour, wheedle, or corrupt thyself in aught, there is no doubt but that thou shalt make much progress in self-knowledge.

But what man ever hated his own self? Love doth pervert judgement, and zeal knoweth not wisdom; wherefore, to the end that through the

Of Examining One's State 19

confirmation of others thou mayest the more firmly believe the accusations thou dost bring forward against thyself, do thou often take anxious thought and provide for this, namely that thy vices may be pointed out to thee by other men; for often the eye of another doth see us better than our own, and may be able to judge the better of us in proportion as that judgement is more free and without partiality. Therefore, after the aforesaid examinations concerning thy temptations, thy passions, and thy vicious dispositions, thou oughtest often to confer with others, to consult them and to make thy plaint to them, that thou mayest be the better instructed by their counsels, the more humbled in that they know thee what thou art, and the more pierced with compunction when thou dost hear from them that thou art vile indeed, as thou hast found out through the aforesaid examinations; and the while those who hear that thou art of this character shall be disposed as not to be corrupted by thy humiliation, but edified thereby.

There is yet one thing more that thou oughtest to consider in regard to the aforesaid examinations, that is to say the second and third of them. Thou dost learn by bestirring thee after this fashion to recognize thine inward vices, to see thine inordinate affections and concupiscence and to ponder the disordered state of the powers of thy soul; but yet thou shalt never be able to see fully and perfectly how strong and deeply rooted such affections are, and how they have become transformed into thy nature, until thou dost set thy hand to them and striving earnestly with all thy might to extirpate them, that thus thou mayest make trial of their strength and their resisting power.

The Spiritual Ascent

¶ Chapter IX. How that before he doth make an upward step a man ought first of all to determine in his heart what his spiritual exercises should be, and to commune with some spiritually minded man as to the same; and how that holy exercises are not to be changed lightly, but that one must persevere in them until he reach the end.

HE *hath ordered upgoings in his heart.*
But before thou dost begin thine upgoing, that is, before thou beginnest to go forward in spiritual progress, thou oughtest to order in thine heart a means that is convenient to thee, by the which thou mayest come to thine end, namely purity of heart or charity. Bestir thyself and anxiously consider what means are convenient for thee and what the better fitted to thy need. If thou canst not tell, ask others, and order thine ascent by others' counsel. Set before thee in thy heart, I say, some end to the which thou mayest direct all thine acts and exercises; then set before thee the steps, exercises, and some fixed scheme by which thou mayest reach that end, and plant firmly in thine heart alike the end and the means thereto. As it seemeth to me to order one's ascent is this, namely to take firm hold upon some means and exercises leading thereto which same are determined by discreet and diligent discourse between thyself and others, and to fix and imprint the same firmly in thine heart; from this shall come great profit to thee. Do these first things, and all the rest in due order after the manner upon which thou hast determined in thine heart, not carelessly, like some who to-day exercise themselves in one way, to-morrow in another, catching at all manner of things in unstable and wandering wise, and making progress in none; these try all ways, and

Of Spiritual Exercises

21

perfect themselves in no one; they do everything at adventure as chance may lead them, because they have in no wise set themselves in order in their heart, nor have determined certainly about aught. Do not thou thus, but do all things agreeably to the manner which thou hast ordained in thine heart for thine upward way. Direct all these acts and exercises to this, that so thou mayest make progress and perfect thyself after the pattern which thou hast set up in thine heart. The LORD said to Moses, "Do all things after the pattern which was shewn to thee on the mount"; but do thou be instant to do all according to the pattern which, after due thought, thou hast set up for thyself. If the builder set not up first in his heart the form and arrangement of the house that he is about to build, erecting therein as it were a pattern house, he could never bring into being an actual house in proper wise, or build it in proper fashion. So, too, it doth behove thee, if thou art to make thy upward way, to follow his pattern in all thine outward acts, and first of all to set up for thyself a ladder. Thus it was that GOD, the first cause of all things, brought into actual being those things themselves in fitting fashion and form, making nothing save in accordance with the essential and ideal pattern of all things. In the next place, by so arranging things beforehand, thou wilt be saved from deception; for they who set up beforehand no model of preordained exercises and spiritual methods, take all that they see other men do as being counsels for themselves in their own exercises; they trust every spirit, they are stable in nothing, nor determined on aught, but in everything they are wandering. For this cause oughtest thou to order these upgoings in thy heart by

The Spiritual Ascent

diligent examination beforehand, in order that in accordance therewith thou mayest be able to rule thy life to the end; praising the life and exercises of others, but not taking the same upon thee, as saith the Abbot Nestor. Likewise thou must order these exercises with discreet moderation, that thou mayest hold thyself stable by means of some alternation and refreshment and not continue too constantly in any one occupation, putting aside all others from thy thoughts, or leaving them as useless; for if thou do this, weariness or infirmity or something of the like nature may overcome thee, for an occupation that doth lack the rest that cometh of change shall produce no lasting good. Wherefore read for a season, that thou mayest be the stronger for prayer, and work for a while that these occupations may unite to serve thee; and all these things shall keep thee standing without weariness if so be that thou pass from one to the other. But let this ordering of thine upward way in thine heart be conformable to Holy Scripture, and approved after taking counsel with some spiritually-minded man.

¶Chapter X. How that a man ought to order this in his heart in one way as regardeth the end, but in another in regard to the means leading to that end.

BUT thou must order this in one way in regard to the end, but in another in regard to the things that lead to that end. The end itself, namely, purity and charity, thou must fix and imprint immovably in thine heart that thou depart not, either by any chance nor by the counsel, nor at the bidding of any, from inward acts of virtue or from charity; but thou oughtest

Of Ordering One's Way 23

to direct all thy works and all thine exercises to this end, and to turn thine eye ever towards the same. For as sailors who have not before their eyes any haven whither they would steer do wander hither and thither, directing their course now to the east and now to the west, as the impulse of the wind doth carry them, and know not whether they be going away from land or coming near to it, so also he that doth good works but knoweth not the end, which is purity, but doth suffer vices to get the dominion over him, cannot tell what progress or backsliding he doth make in the true spiritual life. The things that lead to the end we ought to set before us and order in our heart in that manner in which they may best lead us to that end, namely, charity or purity, but when they hinder us from attaining to these virtues we must leave them readily. Thus we ought not to be so instant in reading or meditation that we cannot leave these occupations, save with murmuring and sullenness, when charity doth call us, for thus we take on us the defilement of sullenness or some other vice. Now it was to extirpate these very things that holy reading and meditation were chosen.

Nor ought we in the matter of such exercises to be so set upon them as upon the end; but when charity or obedience call us we must in humility leave these occupations for a while, but not for ever, because, as saith Bernard, the things that were ordained for Charity's sake must not strive against her.

The Spiritual Ascent

¶ Chapter XI. Of the three upward steps which overcome the three falls afore mentioned, and do lead us back to a state of uprightness. After this it remaineth to speak in the discourse following of the upward steps by which thou oughtest to ascend and return.

THOU hast heard already that thou hast gone down by three descents, as it were by three long stages, from the place in which God set thee, and so in like manner it is needful for thee to return thither by three ascents.

But the first ascent is that by which thou dost climb upward again to thine own heart, for by sin thou hast gone far away out of it, nor canst thou make progress by spiritual exercises in thine heart unless thou return thereto. For this cause it is that the Prophet doth admonish us: "Return, ye transgressors, to the heart."

Thesecsecond ascent, when thou hast so returned, is that thou go up from a heart that is impure through concupiscence to one that is clean; this ascent, which is purity and charity, overcometh the second descent.

The third is in the heart itself, being that by which thou dost go upward and overcome the inordinate affections that were born in thee because of Adam, or have been implanted in thee by thine own act; and this upgoing thou canst order chiefly so as to overcome the first descent.

¶ Chapter XII. Of the first ascent against mortal sin; the three steps of this ascent; and of contrition.

NOW, therefore, arise and go upward; begin to return to thine heart; and this must be by three steps answering to the threefold descent by which thou hast fallen into the full iniquity

of mortal sin; for thou art turned away from thy Creator through pride, which is the formal reason of sin; thou art turned toward the creature through lust of pleasure; and lastly, through thine actions that are contrary to the divine law, thou hadst transgressed the precepts of thy God. Wherefore thou must ascend by three steps in the opposite direction: first thou must turn thine heart from the creature and from sin; thou must have a fixed aversion thereto, and a firm purpose to serve thy God, and never to subject thyself to the creature through unlawful lust of pleasure even though thou die a thousand deaths. This must thou set before thee in general, not examining thyself over each several matter; and thou wilt sorrow greatly that thou art gone away so far from thy God, that thou hast so grievously offended Him, and in a manner crucified Him afresh. Behold such an aversion from evil is in itself one upward step, and the name thereof is Contrition; by this is the hardness of thine heart in a manner broken up; for as in the natural world hard things are said to be broken (*conteri*) when they are crushed into small portions and ground up, so, speaking in a metaphor, the heart is said to be "broken" when it is softened of its hardness. Aforetime, being turned away from God, it was hard and stubborn in sin, yielded not to divine influence, nor received the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit, but turned a deaf ear so as not to hear. But, as said St Bernard (De Cons. i), by a "hard" heart is meant one which is not pierced by compunction, nor softened by piety, nor moved by prayer and the like. But it is contrite when it is melted by compunction and softened by piety.

26 **The Spiritual Ascent**

¶Chapter XIII. Of Confession, which is the second step of this ascent.

FORASMUCH as in thy sins thou hast despised GOD through pride, it is needful that thou submit thyself humbly to some man that is His deputy, and hath the keys, as if he were in GOD's stead, and that standing before him as if before the LORD CHRIST thy Judge, thou confess to him with humility, contrition and grief. That is, show thy humility by accusing thyself in each matter, and acknowledging thine own sins in behaviour, in deed, in the words thou hast uttered, in thine answers and all other matters severally, standing before him as before thy Judge. Beware lest in confessing thy sins thou seek to be praised, as the manner of some is, for by so doing thou shalt earn reprobation of GOD; they who are wont to argue with subtlety in the schools make their confession after this wise, as also do others.

Likewise abstain from excusing thy sins or their intention, but say simply and humbly what is gnawing at thy conscience. Thou must also confess with contrition and grief, exercising thyself before confession in compunction after a fashion that shall be considered hereafter, that thou mayest come to confession contrite and grief-stricken. If thou do this well, thou wilt not tell thy sins as a mere story, as is the fashion of some, nor simply recount them without grief as if thou wert speaking of some other worldly matter; but if thou hast truly conceived the spirit of compunction sometimes it shall be hard for thee to speak, and thou wilt not be able to restrain thy tears. Of this thou must be well assured that thy sins are forgiven thee through confession in proportion to thine intention to be contrite and thy humble lowliness. Likewise, if it be possible, thou

oughtest to choose such a confessor as doth know how to remit or retain sins with discretion and prudence, for to such an one thou canst commit thy soul with confidence; to him thou canst safely reveal thy state, thy life, and all thine exercises, as to one from whom thou shalt receive counsel in each several matter. And when thou hast found such a confessor, do not lightly change him, for different physicians use different medicines, and medicine often changed doth not heal but doth disturb the sick man. Yet in all these things the right and obedience to the Church and thy superior must ever be preserved.

Also thou must know that good works enjoined upon thee by the priest do give manifold more satisfaction than those that are undertaken by thyself of thine own motion; and this is chiefly because of the power of the keys which the Church holdeth, and also because of the lowly obedience of the penitent. When thou dost uncover thy wounds to thy priest, and he, as he properly ought to be, is wishful to use the milder remedies, show thyself forward to bear these and, as occasion doth offer, even be somewhat importunate that he may not spare thee, but boldly enjoin upon thee those things which seem to him expedient to thy state and thine amendment. This is the second step of the first ascent, and is called Oral confession.

¶ Chapter XIV. Of Satisfaction, which is the third step of the first ascent.

THE third step of the first ascent is this, namely, that as thou hast given thy members to sin as instruments of iniquity by means of divers offences and evil deeds, so now thou make them instruments of righteousness to sanctifica-

tion, to the end that thou mayest heal contraries by contraries, that is, acting in a manner contrary to those evils which thou hast done; and, above all, by opposing those vices and passions by which thou art most often beset. This is done by fasting, by watching, by labour and other devout exercises, and these, as hath been said, are to be undertaken chiefly at the injunction of thy confessor, because in this way they are the more meritorious in thee.

This is the last step of the first ascent, and is called Satisfaction. By these three steps is the first ascent finished, and by these three parts of penitence dost thou return to thine heart, and art likewise reconciled to God.

¶ Chapter XV. Here beginneth the second ascent, which overcometh the second descent, whereby a man doth return to purity; and how that uncleanness of heart consisteth in three things, to overcome which three a man goeth upward also in this second ascent by three steps.

SEE, O man, thou art made whole and reconciled to God; go forward and advance yet further and resolve to sin no more, but rather make progress from virtue to virtue, nor think that to be reconciled to God through penance is sufficient to ensure that thou art accepted into His friendship and into perfect charity. Knowest thou not that Absalom, although reconciled to his father, was not yet worthy to see his face until he had remained in his own house for a set time?

In like manner, if thou dost desire to look upon the face of God with a pure heart, do not thou presume to do this hastily, but first be zealous to ascend a little way, to exercise thyself for a

Of the Second Ascent 29

great while by this upgoing and to arrive at purity; prove thine heart thrice, cleanse it again seven times, purging and purging it thereby to the very bottom, until the dregs thereof and its uncleanness are wholly purged away. For, as we said above, when a man doth return to his heart, whence he had gone out after lusts, albeit he is reconciled and purged of guilt by grace, yet there abide still the lees and unclean dregs in the soul of the sinner, that is to say, hurtful affections with unclean and clinging defilements that are gotten by sin and ingrained by habit; these thou must purge away and get thee gone from them, one by one, and go upward. This it is to go forward from an impure heart to purity thereof, and to ascend so as to overcome the second descent that hath been set forth above. But in order to overcome this descent it is needful to set in order three upgoings in thine heart, seeing that the impurity thereof and of thine affections seemeth to consist in three things; first, that through inordinate affection thou dost cleave too closely to the lowest things, or art above measure inclined thereto (say to vainglory, honour, praise, gluttony, luxury and the like), thereby loving things that are not worthy love; secondly, the impurity consisteth in this that thou lovest not things that are worthy, but thine affections and appetites are so unclean, impure and infected with evil humours that things spiritual and heavenly have no savour for them, but, in a fashion, they sicken at the heavenly manna and are not moved by the thought of the kingdom of heaven and the like. This uncleanness may be called hatred of things that are not worthy hate, and it pertaineth to them that savour not the things they ought to savour.

The third impurity of heart is a certain infirmity and sluggishness, by the which a man, though already purged in his affection, and even in some measure restored by hope, is yet made unprofitable and insufficient to cleave to GOD with the fervent affections of a love made perfect, because the full vigour of charity faileth him. To overcome these impurities of thine heart thou must make three ascents in succession, that is go forward by three steps of virtue. For to overcome the first impurity we ascend by means of the fear of the LORD, which, as it were, doth shake the heart violently and breaketh it away from hurtful affections for lower things and from ills that cling thereto. To overcome the second impurity we ascend by hope, for this doth lighten our heart and revive therein the taste for heavenly things by giving it a desire to gain them.

To overcome the third impurity we ascend by charity, by the which we are united to GOD and cleave to Him. But of these matters we must speak more fully one by one.

¶ Chapter XVI. Of the first step of this ascent, which consisteth in fear; in this step our heart is by fear withdrawn from hurtful affections and attachments.

SINCE, therefore, thy heart lieth in the snares of concupiscence, becometh so fixed thereto and stamped therewith that scarce can it be torn away, and doth suck thence the honey of noxious delight and the milk of hurtful refreshment, therefore it doth become thee to sprinkle these with some bitter medicine, just as women who wean their babies do smear their breasts with some bitter matter, that having tasted this the child may turn away from his desire for the milk,

and after a while forget it altogether. Thus, too, it is fitting that the fear of the LORD should fill thine heart with things most bitter; for example, thou art full of worldly desires and carnal vices; with all thy heart thou dost yearn after high place and worldly glory; it is hard for thee to do without delicate meats; grievous to thee to be despised and lightly entreated. Therefore let the fear of the LORD come into thine heart and sprinkle all the sweetness of those things with divers bitter thoughts, setting before thee to thy terror, and showing thee how that the delights of the world do quickly pass away; how the penalty for any inordinate delight is great and beyond telling; how little thou shalt get therefrom, and how a just Judge shall come with severity and dread to punish thee for these things; with these and suchlike thoughts ought thine heart to be embittered, smitten with fear and perturbed with dread, and so violently torn away from her delights till she forget them. Wherefore neglect not to make out of these and suchlike thoughts a decoction which, though it be bitter, yet hath wondrous virtue to purge evil humours, that is thy concupiscence; with this thou canst besprinkle and wash away every worldly delight which thou wilt easily reject and loathe, being affrighted by the bitterness with which thou hast besprinkled it. But to the end that thou mayest be able to make this kind of decoction as often as thou wilt—and the name thereof is Compunction—see, I will describe the manner of preparing it.

¶ Chapter XVII. How Compunction which is born of fear may be brought about in various and divers manners by exercises and by meditation.

COMPUNCTION is born of fear in manifold ways. First of all when one doth bring his past sins to remembrance, and doth anxiously call to mind how greatly he hath offended God and how grievous a punishment he hath earned, and by reason of these thoughts doth weep most bitterly, in fear and trembling.

Secondly, compunction cometh when he doth diligently consider his own defects, the passions of his soul and the noxious desires that are still in him, and even though they rule him not yet do shake and vex him; and when he doth remember, with cries and lamentation, how little is the progress he hath made in casting out these evils.

Thirdly, when a man doth remember the sins that he hath committed since his conversion (for though they be not high crimes yet let him not doubt that God is thereby offended every day), and when with mourning and fear he doth deplore the same.

Of these three things we have spoken above in the chapter concerning the three methods of sifting and examination.

Fourthly, when one doth consider that the judgements of God are inscrutable and a man knoweth not whether he be worthy hatred or love, and that albeit he knoweth himself penitent, yet he cannot tell whether he is smitten with fear only or whether he hath compunction and contrition through the grace that is infused into him; and when he is altogether smitten with dread through his ignorance and uncertainty what shall happen to him in time to come, whether he shall be damned or saved.

Compunction is Profitable 33

Fifthly, when he doth diligently ponder the shortness of his life, and understandeth that he hath made so little progress hitherto, whence he is set afire by fear, and inwardly bedewed with compunction.

Sixthly, when he doth remember the strict examination and judgement to come, when the Judge shall draw near to render to every man according to his works; then, since the man knoweth his own sins, he is adread at this thought.

Seventhly, when one doth weigh the greatness and multitude of the pains of hell, and knoweth or thinketh himself worthy of them; then doth he begin to grieve and fear mightily.

¶ Chapter XVIII. How that Compunction is profitable; and of the manner in which it doth purify the heart.

IF thou dost earnestly ponder these things in thine heart, and dost often fill it with these thoughts or with some of them, all sweet things become bitter to thee; then shall the world and the desire thereof depart out of thine heart; yea also the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes do vanish by this means, and being inwardly filled with this bitterness thou shalt feel none outwardly. Thus shall thine heart begin to reject all the sweetness of the world and its affections and clings, whether it be to worldly glory or honour or the favour of the people, and inwardly to loathe gluttony and luxury. But to the end that thou mayest have at hand the means whereby to prepare this kind of Compunction, let us now set down the method of collecting the matters whereof it is composed, just as we have already described the manner of preparing it.

¶ Chapter XIX. A general method to be used for shaping meditations about death.

MEDITATE therefore upon this, and let the image thereof never depart from thine eyes, namely, that after a short sojourn here thou must depart from this life into another region that is unknown. All worldly things, the glory and honour and whatever else there be in which thou delightest in this world, these must thou leave here. Every hour and every day thou dost come nearer to thine end and the last hour of thy life. Therefore examine thine affections, and so far as thou canst transform them into those of a dying man whilst there is time, and form them within thee and in thy meditation as if thou wert to die forthwith, and as though that which without doubt shall come were already present with thee. Consider then, since thine affections are such, how much thou dost grieve inwardly, how great is thy remorse of conscience and thine inward crying against thine evil lusts, and how greatly thou shalt grieve in that thou hast not amended thyself nor torn thyself from thy lusts, and in that thou hast transgressed the precepts of GOD; for in that hour thou shalt see what thou hast deserved and what thou hast done. Hitherto thou hast kept thy several lusts before thine eyes; see now each vice and passion wherein lately hath been thy sweet delight. Consider how bitter a thing it shall be to thee to be separated from thy desires, and how greatly thou shalt grieve because in thy life thou wast not dead to concupiscence. Then think and fashion in thee such affections after this manner, namely, by considering that if thy soul should depart straightway how gladly thou wouldest leave every lust and thankfully seize upon every toil

Meditations about Death 35

and penance if only thou couldest get life thereby.

Next consider how short, in that hour, will seem all the time of thy life and thy delights. Then shalt thou see that all thy time hath gone by like a dream or like a shadow, and especially when thou dost ponder this, that eternity which hath no end is standing at the door. Also think how great shall be thy grief in that, for the sake of very small delight of but brief duration, thou hast lost joy, happiness and glory eternal; remember that all these delights shall bring thee nothing any more, save that they shall make a bitter death yet more bitter; for in what measure thou wast bound by inordinate desires to a multitude of things, in that measure it shall be the harder for thee to be severed therefrom, wherefore the wise man saith: "O death, how bitter is thy memory to a man that is whole and hath peace in his substance." But when thou dost perceive that this disposition of mind is formed within thee and graven on thine heart, then go further and think how that hour shall certainly come and thou mayest not avoid it; for all men die, and since the beginning of the world a thousand generations have passed, and thou in like manner must follow. But then consider this, that thou canst not know that hour of a certainty, but it shall come unforeseen, perchance this year, perchance this month, perchance this very week, for as a thief so shall it come in the night when thou thinkest not of it, but dost set before thee to do many things. Sometimes also turn over in thy mind the manner in which thou shalt come to die, that by this means dread may the better torment and purge away thy desires; for verily most grievous weakness doth for the

most part go before death. Think, then, how great this weakness shall be, and how heavy the infirmity when thy heart shall be broken for overmuch sorrow. Bethink thee that then shalt thine heart be heavy as if the whole world were laid on it, and this cometh both from the heaviness of infirmity and because the heart hath horror past telling at the natural desire which doth assail it, and likewise from fear of one's sins and judgement to come; and so, at length, death doth follow. Likewise sometimes set before thine eyes the sight of a dying man, and diligently consider the aspect, the manner and the order in which he cometh to death; all his body doth become livid, his limbs stiffen, his eyes turn, and so forth; and then bethink thee how devils shall come waiting like roaring lions ready for food, if so be they can find in the soul anything proper to them; how unclean spirits shall meet the soul as she goeth forth, seeking to find in her their own works, that they may drag her down with them to the depths of hell. Then consider how the soul, having gone forth from the body, is set straightway before the Judge's seat, there and then to receive the sentence which shall not be changed thenceforth through the ages. Afterward follow the corpse to burial, and see how the wretched flesh, for whose sake the man did so earnestly seek pleasure, is left to the earth, and made food for worms and given over to unending forgetfulness. From these and like things thou wilt well perceive that the joy and pleasure of this world are but a jot, they pass like a shadow, and that man is here but as the guest of a single night.

On the other side, thou oughtest sometimes to turn thy thoughts to the death of a just man

On the Last Judgement 37

and one that is well prepared to die, thinking what manner of end his shall be who hath aforetime repented, hath purged him of his lusts, and loveth nothing here in evil fashion, and so forth in each several matter.

¶ Chapter XX. General thoughts on the Last Judgement by which a man may strike terror into himself.

NEXT turn the eye of thy mind to the Last Judgement, that through the most bitter thoughts thereof all sweet things may become bitter. Bethink thee, therefore, how great dread, how loud a cry and what wonderment shall be when the trump of the archangel shall sound; when lightnings shall flash in dreadful wise and thunders roar; when to the terror of sinners the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light. Think what manner of heart the sinner shall have in that day; how that all the dead shall arise, each bringing with him what he hath done, whether it be good or whether it be evil; and the good shall await their Judge with joy unspeakable, but the unjust shall look for His coming and His face with a terror that none may tell, saying: "Ye mountains, fall upon us and hide us from the face of the Judge," for Time is departed and gone, and there is no place whither they may get them and buy the oil of good deeds. Then come forth and in thy vision meet and behold the Judge coming with great might and with the elders of the people, all the angels and the saints bearing them company, and think upon that bitter division when He doth separate the sheep from the goats. Now are there two in one house and at one mill, then the one shall be taken and the other left, never

38 **The Spiritual Ascent**

more to be joined together. Put thyself in the place of them upon the left, to whom it shall be said: "Depart, ye cursed, into the fire," and so forth. Then shall they lament, saying: "Lo, these are they whom of old we held in derision"; how great shall be the suffering of these, and how great their grief. Then put thyself in place of them that are on the right hand; with how great gladness are they filled in that they have earned an eternal recompense in return for but small toil. Bethink thee that then shall an examination be holden strictly into deeds, words, thoughts and evil dispositions; then shall all things be naked and open, yea, even the things that were aforesaid cloaked, for Jerusalem shall be searched with lanterns and there shall be found therein certain Babylonians who were reputed to be citizens of Zion. There shall be the devil as a witness who shall show us the sins we have committed, the time whereat and the place wherein we have done amiss, and he shall say: "Judge most just, give judgement upon this man, and for his fault's sake yield to me him who through his pride would not be Thine." Thine own conscience shall accuse thee, yea, and also the holy angels. There shall CHRIST show to thee the marks of His Passion, and from evil men shall take away the benefits of His Incarnation, for the cause that they have despised them and have been unthankful. Then doth the Judge pass sentence that is final, from which none may appeal, which none may contradict and none escape, nor shall any prevail to defend himself. Think what bitterness, what suffering, what horror, that sentence may contain: "Go, ye cursed"; what sweetness, what marvel, what joy the word: "Come, ye blessed." At times also think of thine own

judgement in particular, and fashion thy meditation each in his own way after the manner aforesaid.

¶ Chapter XXI. How that a man, by remembering the pains of hell, doth get Dread and Compunction.

THEN turn thine eyes toward the region of the damned and the prison house of the wretched, diligently considering what things are done therein, the condition of them that sojourn there, and what manner of place it is. But forasmuch as our mind, for its blindness' sake, is better led by things visible and sensible to the understanding of the invisible, thou canst put before thee the images set forth by saints in the Holy Scriptures concerning this matter, so that thou mayest the better apprehend the pains that are there. Consider then the chaos of hell, a place most dread beneath the earth and very deep; all dark it is, a well that is without bottom and all afire. It is a furnace glowing and flaming in dreadful wise, and this vast region is dark and murky but all aglow and heated, and it is filled with a multitude of people unnumbered, all crying aloud and uttering sounds of woe, calling out for pain and burning, and gnawing one another for very malice as though they were foul dogs held together in leash. Then consider the grievous nature of the punishment. There is an overwhelming heat, to which our heat here is in no wise comparable. There is cold that none may bear, to which no cold that is known in this earth can be made to bear likeness even by comparing them. Think then of the exquisite nature and the torment of each pang, the numberless pains there are. It is a

fire that never shall be quenched, an ardent heat that yet doth give no light. There is cold that cannot be borne with feter must foul, darkness that may be felt and worms that die not; pains ravage every sense and every limb. Thine eye shall see the spawn of hell that by the terror of their aspect do wondrously afflict them that look thereon; thine ears shall hear naught but lamentation and moaning and savage cries, with such words as: "Alas, alas, ah woe is us that ever we were born, that ever we were created of GOD, and that we die not. Cursed be GOD, and cursed the Trinity that hath created us to this torment." Lo, this is the litany that there they sing, giving voice to their lamentation and woe. Think of that most wretched companionship of devils, and of the cruelty of the tormentors since they are without pity. They weary not in tormenting, they are not moved to compassion, but shall make worse the torture in every way they can. Yea, they themselves exult, saying: "Where is now thy glory; where thy pleasure, thine honour, thy lofty station? Where thy boundless wealth, thy power, thine high place, thine authority? What profit hast thou now of all the things that have been? So short they were, so quickly did they pass!" Consider that every man shall be punished the more in those members wherein he hath offended, whether it be his tongue or his heart; and the more a man hath exalted himself, and hath lived in delights, so shall he be smitten there with more grievous pains.

Think also of the inward pains, and chiefly of the privation of the Vision of GOD, which pain doth exceed all others; consider that the lost are for ever under the ban and cast forth from

On the Pains of Hell 41

Jerusalem, that celestial and glorious city, never to return thereto. Think on the worm of conscience that never shall die, nor ceaseth; it doth cry out against men and afflict them because they have fallen to this punishment for a joy so small that it is but as a jot. Also think on the passions of the soul, the anger and malice with which they are afflicted; for wrath, malice, and so forth, do chiefly reign in the lost. Likewise diligently ponder the eternity of the punishment, for this eternity is more grievous affliction than all the sufferings; there is no end to these, nor any redemption therefrom. After a thousand times a thousand years yet is the end no nearer, for end there is none.

By these and like meditations thou shalt conceive the fear of the LORD, and prepare an wholesome compunction, so that by such means thou mayest tear away thine affections from the lowest things; but it doth behove thee to continue for a great while in these exercises and to purge the said affections by meditations after this wise, and by other virtuous acts, and specially in the remedying of vices concerning which somewhat shall be said hereafter, for we cannot ascend further by any other means. The more we cast away our carnal and earthly affections the more do we add to ourselves spiritual affections; if we do this but little, we add but little, but much if we do it much. Wherefore, as saith the Prophet, by means of the fear of the LORD we must bring forth the spirit of salvation, for the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and therein must we earnestly exercise ourselves and purge our heart that we may attain to charity. Whence a wise man hath said: "They must be made to begin from fear, that they may

The Spiritual Ascent

attain to their end, which is charity." Thou seest, therefore, how fittingly the Holy Scripture doth write down purity of heart next to faith, saying this: "Purifying their hearts by faith;" because fear, which is the first effect of faith, doth tear the heart and rend it away from unclean affections and vicious defilements.

This, then, is the first step of the second ascent by which one reacheth out to purity of heart, namely faith, or fear which is the outcome thereof.

¶ Chapter XXII. Of the second step of the second ascent, which is through Hope and yearning for things heavenly and spiritual, by which a man is purged and made whole of the second impurity of heart.

AS Faith doth make the contagion of vice to decrease, by means of fear of judgement to come and dread of punishment, making all our inward thoughts to quake as it were, and withdrawing them from corrupt affections and from cleaving to lower things, so doth hope coming after faith call away our mind from the present and raise it to the contemplation of higher things; for that mind is now torn away from the affections aforenamed, but it is not yet lifted up, yea it is even sunken beneath the weight of dread. But through an expectation of an heavenly recompense a man doth now despise all the pleasures of the flesh and the vanities of the world; and beginning to sigh after things above, aspireth to that lofty gladness which hope hath set before his heart. Wherefore, if thou dost perceive that through fear thine heart is now withdrawn from the lowest things, yet be not content here to abide, nor think that thou hast the con-

Of the Second Step 43

clusion of the whole matter. If thou hast begun to stand still, thou hast already gone downward, for verily thine heart cannot be empty of all affections. If, therefore, it be emptied of those that are evil, let it be filled with those that are heavenly and holy, otherwise it shall fall back again. Wherefore, even while thou dost purge thyself in fear, it is expedient for thee sometimes to breathe in hope. But he that hath purged his heart already by continuing a great while in fear, doth make his ascent to hope after a manner far different. Wherefore hope is the upward way to overcome the second impurity of heart, which doth consist in this, that thine affections are so deeply tainted with concupiscence or lowered with the dregs thereof, and have become so weak, that they savour not heavenly things. For hope doth infuse into the affections the savour for things eternal, and doth restore them again to the love of that which is higher. Wherefore (as hath been said above) just as a man doth become impure by cleaving to lower things, intermingling therewith or inclining thereto, so by cleaving and inclining to the higher he becometh pure, and some measure of cleanness of heart is hereby acquired, that is to say, an affection toward heavenly and spiritual things, and this cometh of hope.

Therefore, O man, set before thee the image of a place all pure and clean that is above thee, and of another place beneath where all is unrest and turbulence, where is ceaseless change, where all is befouled and impure, and think that thou standest between these twain. Then in proportion as thou dost go downward into the place beneath, in that proportion art thou disquieted by thy lusts, made unstable by divers desires and impure by

unclean affections and the admixture of things impure. But in proportion as thou goest upward by constant meditation, by continual affections and desires toward heavenly things, and by hope for the same and admixture therewith, in that proportion shalt thou be the more quiet and stable, longing for one thing only, that is to be in the halls of Jerusalem. So shalt thou be made the more pure through the intermixture in thee of better things.

¶Chapter XXIII. Of Compunction through love and how a man shall exercise himself therein.

WHEN, trembling for dread, thou didst begin to ascend higher, being constrained thereto, we gave to thee a certain medicine to purge away those evil humours, by the which thou wast hindered from thine ascent. But forasmuch as some infirmity hath still remained to thee by reason of such humours, and some corruption of taste, so that thou art the less able to go upward because things spiritual have little savour to thee, therefore take for thine healing another medicine that doth come from hope of pardon, that is to say the compunction that is of love. For if through hope thou dost desire to go upward, thou must by all means exercise thyself in this compunction, which is chiefly prepared in two ways, albeit it may be prepared in many others. Firstly, when thou hast made an upward step, after being stirred up for a great while by dread and the horror thereof; when thou hast done many good works and performed many devout exercises; when thou shalt have been cut off from hurtful lusts and, by the help of GOD, hast ascended so far as to reach hope, then standing in hope thou seest from afar off

Of Compunction through Love 45

Jerusalem that is in Heaven, the city of the vision of peace, which thing could not come to thee whiles thou wast in dread. Then dost thou begin to look oft towards the city and to contemplate her wondrous beauty, and drawn on by the fairness thereof to sigh, to groan and to lament in that thou art still so far off and dost desire to be released and to be with CHRIST, crying aloud: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And then, bethinking thee that thou art yet a sojourner too far off from that heavenly Jerusalem, thou dost begin to weep soft tears and often to mourn that thou canst not attain thereto.

Secondly, this compunction cometh when thou dost ponder earnestly in thine heart and dost take count of the benefits of GOD which He hath given thee in so great number and with so mighty a love. Then dost thou begin to think on thine own thanklessness, and thy heart doth swell and expand with an inward yearning toward love for thy GOD Who hath done so great kindnesses for thee. This is the compunction of filial love springing from the fount of charity, and it hath wondrous power to overcome the second impurity of heart. But to the end that thou mayest have means whereby thou shalt be able the more readily to inflame thyself to this compunction after the two methods aforementioned, here doth follow a way by which thou canst mould and stimulate thy meditations concerning the blessedness of Heaven.

¶ Chapter XXIV. A general method of moulding one's meditations concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, so as to have Compunction and a desire to reach that Kingdom.

BUT thou canst set before thee the sensible Image of that heavenly country, which was devised by saints to suit our understanding. The city, then, is of glorious extent and vast size, and is of the purest gold, being builded in wondrous wise of the most precious jewels, and each of her gates is of a single pearl. There is, likewise, a most glorious expanse decked with the beauty of all manner of flowers; there it is ever fair summer, there is the most fragrant sweetness of odours and an abundance of all delectable things. Consider, then, and with all thy might gather together thy thoughts to ponder this, that thou mayest see how great a joy it is to look upon God for ever in Very Essence, to gaze with the pure eyes of the heart upon the Most High and undivided Trinity, for therefrom doth shine forth the essential pattern of all beauty, all sweetness and all goodness; in this Vision thou shalt see all things and know all that thou wilt; by this thou shalt be filled with all good, all gladness and all joy; in this blessed shalt thou be, and shalt enjoy the Most Supreme Blessedness which is God.

Bethink thee how great a joy it is to stand for ever beside the LORD JESUS and to behold His Most Holy and Glorious humanity (for Peter, seeing Him transfigured, desired to abide so continually); to behold on high and glorious in His kingdom Him Who of old for our sakes came to this place of exile as an outcast and a stranger, and to take part in the High Council of Heaven. What happiness it is to behold the Queen of

Of the Benefits of God 47

Heaven, the Mother of GOD, in company with the other virgins; what happiness and exultation to company with the hosts of angels, to rejoice with patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors. Consider the corporal gifts with which thy body shall be blessed, namely, its immortality, immunity from suffering, wondrous mobility and most glorious beauty. Consider, also, the gifts spiritual wherewith, when made blessed, thy soul herself shall be filled, that is, fullness of knowledge as concerneth the rational powers; as concerneth those concupiscent, fullness of justice; as concerneth the power irascible, superabundance of joy. Think how from these principal endowments thou shalt gain many other mighty and unspeakable gifts, namely, safety, so that thou shalt no more fear to be cast out, nor be afraid lest thou be overcome of the flesh, the devil or the world. Likewise thou shalt have freedom to do whatsoever thou wilt, and joy most pure and pleasant in both body and soul, with friendship, love, honour, peace and all perfect charity. To put all together in a word, thou shalt have whatsoever thou wilt and nothing that thou wouldest not.

¶Chapter XXV. How that a man, by being mindful of the benefits that GOD hath done him, is inflamed in devotion and kindled to compunction.

BUT to the end that thou mayest have more confidence to hope for, and to attain, future glory, thou oughtest sometimes to turn over carefully in thy mind the tokens of love which the LORD hath shown thee, and to ponder yet more diligently upon the benefits that He hath done, and by these thoughts to be stirred as by goads to love Him in return.

Consider then, in the first place, how mighty is this token of the love of thy God, that although thou hast so often offended Him, so often turned thy back to Him, so often departed from Him, so often sinned most grievously, yet as often as thou wast willing to return He hath received thee, hath forgiven thy sins when thou didst grieve over them, and when thou wast amending and correcting them hath holpen thee.

Tell the tale, if thou canst, of the natural gifts he hath conferred upon thee; He created thee and brought thee into being from nothing, making thy nature beautiful and fair, sensible and living and endowed with thy five senses. To thee gave He understanding beyond that of the lower creatures, by the which thou mightest excel all other living things and be able to apprehend thy God and understand the very truth. Moreover, upon this understanding of thine He did pour out the light of His countenance, and conferred upon thee great clearness of natural light. Likewise He endowed thee with the power of recollection, by the which thou mightest renew the images of things by recalling their likeness whenever it might please thee to remember aught. In like manner gave He understanding of that which may come to pass, whereby thou mightest determine what kinds of things perceptible are like to recur again. He made thy soul to be of such dignity and nobility that nothing could fill it to the full, nor aught surpass its understanding save the Holy and most Glorious Trinity, the one God in Whose image and similitude He created thee. Why should I say more? He gave thee the sun to light thee by day and the moon to shine on thee by night, and likewise made all the lower creatures for thy service and to minister to thee.

Of the Benefits of God 49

Next consider the gifts of grace conferred upon thee, for He gave thee contrition and sorrow for sin, and likewise recalled thee from iniquity, and endowed thee with righteousness which is the attribute of God only; but this gift He denied to many. Also He gave and inspired thee with will by the which thou mightest desire to amend thyself. He ordained the time at which, and the place in which, thou mightest be able so to amend, and all these things He hath withheld from others that are better than thou.

Consider His gifts of supreme goodness, namely, that He gave thee His most Blessed SON; first, in the Incarnation—since for thee was He born, and for thee crucified; secondly, in the Sacrament of the altar in the Bread and Wine. He sent thee the HOLY SPIRIT to signify thine acceptance, to confer the privileges of love upon thee and the ring of betrothal.

But to the end that thou mayest lift thyself up yet further to love, to devotion and to the compunction of piety, think how much this mighty LORD hath wrought on behalf of thy salvation; verily He spake with the Fathers, made Himself manifest in figures, spake in the Prophets, led thee forth from Egypt and into the land of promise, and likewise wrought endless marvels and wonders. And with what purpose did He all these things, save out of tenderness and love for thee, that thou mayest be enabled to gain the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal blessedness, that He might illumine thine understanding by the knowledge of heavenly things, and purge thine affections from things that are beneath? Wherefore all this ought to lift up thy hope and thine affections to the love of thy God. But to the end that these and suchlike meditations upon the

goodness of GOD may move thee yet more, thou oughtest to hold fast this manner of thinking and to direct thine affections to this, namely, that thou inquire diligently into the vastness and might of the Benefactor who hath conferred all these things upon thee.

For He is most mighty, as thou mayest see in the creation. He is most wise, as is manifest in His governance and most provident ordering of things created: for this cause oughtest thou greatly to esteem every gift, however small, that He hath given.

Secondly, thou must think upon and ponder this, namely, with how great care and tenderness He conferred these benefits upon thee. From all eternity He determined to give these things to thee, from all eternity He predestined this; from all eternity, I say, in very deed and without cessation, it was of thee that He thought and ordained aforehand to work thee good. So was He, and so is He, busied on thy behalf, just as He is busied on behalf of a whole city or even the whole world, for He doth watch over thee as anxiously as if He had no other care beside.

In the third place thou must take to thyself, and to thyself apply, all the divine goodness that hath been conferred upon mankind in general, as though this had been conferred upon thee alone, and think: "It was for my sake that He made all the world and all things that are therein; it was for me that He was crucified," and so forth. This thought shall kindle thee in no small wise to Love, Charity and Thankfulness, and shall render thee yet more sensible of benefits so great.

Likewise oughtest thou to give heed to thyself and wonder that to one so vile, so worthless, so lukewarm, so unthankful, He hath done so great

Of the Third Step

51

benefits with a yearning and a love so mighty.

¶ Chapter XXVI. Here beginneth the treatise concerning the third step of this ascent, which is in Charity and Purity of heart (for in these doth this ascent consist), and how a man may know when he is come to this step of Purity and Charity.

IN the ascents aforesaid and in the steps thereof is expended all the toil of them that begin and go forward, and hitherto they labour to reach the same with great strivings, with many pains, with watchings, with fasting, with reading, with meditation, with the labour of their hands and other devout exercises and works of piety. The lukewarm, the negligent and the careless cannot ascend thither, neither can the coward or the slothful man. For verily it is no small toil in making this first ascent to put away one's past life, to mourn and repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. But it is a yet greater, or at the least a yet longer, toil to overcome ancient habit that hath become inveterate; to leave inordinate affections and inclinations to lower things; to purge uncleanness, impurity and the affections thereto that have been contracted; to stifle the lust of gluttony; to put down luxury; to smother wrath; to fight down pride, and so forth, with other vicious affections, all which things pertain to the purgation of fear. But it is a yet more toilsome, or at the least a loftier, step then to lift up the whole soul and all the affections (so far as is possible in this step) to heavenly things, and to dwell in Heaven through Hope.

Consider how vast and mighty an ascent lieth between stage and stage of the upward way, that is between fear and hope, in so far as the height

of the ascent and the toil of traversing it pertain to this present consideration. Yet he that hath done his journey well hitherto is come nearer already to purity and charity, albeit he must go up yet further by means of certain other steps: for he must exercise himself for a great while and daily in going up and down these two steps of fear and hope, striving to fight down noxious affections, pride, wrath, gluttony, and the like, transferring as it were into his nature humility, chastity, and the other virtues. But there are two things which constitute progress in this third step of purity and charity. The first is this, that a man hath already put on an affection to virtue and in a manner transferred this into his nature, so that he doth virtuous deeds no longer through the constraint of fear, nor through the inducement of hope for reward, but because he doth take delight in the pure affection to good that dwelleth in him. Also through the same affection to purity and charity (that is to say, love of virtue, the yearning desire therefore that hath become his inward habit, and his heart-felt delight therein) he doth abhor maliciousness and impurity for their very natures' sake. Now he doth virtuous deeds, not as one striving against his desires but having in his heart an affection to virtue for her own sake; not only doth he refuse to harbour within him aught that may be contrary to the said affection, but doth even detest it with the deepest loathing.

This is he that doth good deeds for their own sake, because his delight is in an affection to the good; for he that doth enjoy the quietness of peace, having overcome the assaults of evil, and doth pass over to an affection to virtue herself, that man shall maintain continually in its place

the good of which he is altogether a part, because he doth believe that no loss is greater than that of inward purity; nor doth he judge aught to be more dear and precious than actual purity, for to him the noxious transgression of virtue is in itself a grievous punishment. The upright behaviour of such an one will not be the greater by reason of the presence of other men and his reverence for them, nor will solitude diminish it. But in that he doth everywhere carry about with him and above him an arbiter to judge not his deeds only, but also his thoughts—and that arbiter is conscience—therefore he doth take to him no defilement of mind.

The second thing is that just as affection to virtue hath become a habit in him after the manner aforesaid, so also, being thus disposed, he must be united with God by ardent love, ever prepared to do the good pleasure of the Divine Will through his fervency of spirit, and continue intent upon the contemplation of the Divine: for, indeed, he doth cleave to God through fervent love, and by reason of the Vision of Him doth abhor vice and sin. By this love and this Vision he is ever kindled with zeal, doth earnestly love truth, is fired with the desire of wisdom and loveth holiness of life and discipline of character—for that character doth hold boastfulness a shame, hateth detraction, knoweth not envy, detesteth pride, and not only fleeth from honour before men, but doth even abhor and despise it. Likewise such a character doth most vehemently loathe and persecute all impurity of heart within itself, and as if by its very nature doth both reject all that is evil and embrace that which is good.

This is the fruitful mountain, and whosoever shall ascend it may go in and out and find pas-

ture. For going in, that is to say into his own heart, he shall find in his powers concupiscent joy in the HOLY SPIRIT, great-heartedness, kindness, modesty and so forth; and in his powers irascible, courage, constancy, perseverance, patience and the like. By his understanding he doth often climb beyond himself to the apprehension of the Vision of God, albeit he doth apprehend this as in a glass darkly. But going out he is kindled to the Love of the Creator by the knowledge of the creature and its beauty.

Compare then this state to that in which, as aforesaid, Adam was set, and see how far the one is from the other. This is the state of Perfection, this is the mount of Purity, this the whole upward way thereto which is true Charity.

He that can go up, let him go; he that can attain, let him attain; but let the sluggard that doth flee from toil depart. For all this state of perfection may be attained by no man except it be by the special grace of God, which grace is not given to sleepers, to the negligent nor to them that will not work together with Him, wherefore it is said: "Love is a kind of war; hence those who fear." But men may climb up to this height step by step, and come near to it by daily exercise.

¶ Chapter XXVII. Of the three steps of the ascent which overcome the third impurity; by these, each in his order, is a man so disposed as to be able to cleave more perfectly to God.

NOW, it hath been said above that the third impurity of heart doth consist in a certain disability and unfitness for cleaving to God and knowing Him. From this it cometh that though the affections be purged, and hope hath been

recovered, yet perchance a man may not always be able and fit to cleave to GOD, nor to abide quietly in Him through his affections; and yet, as we have said, this is that in which alone the higher step of purity and charity doth consist. Wherefore one must set forth the manner in which, going up step by step in due order, a man may become fit for this, to the end that he who is occupied in casting out the third impurity may become more fully pure.

For this purpose thou must order once more fresh ascents in thine heart, that thereby thou mayest learn and accustom thyself likewise to cleave to GOD through charity. And for the ordering of these ascents thou must know this, namely, that CHRIST JESUS, who is GOD and man and the Mediator between GOD and men, is Himself the Way by the which thou oughtest to ascend to the knowledge of the Divine, and to Love, as saith Augustine in the seventh chapter of the *Confessions*. For chiefly to this end did CHRIST take flesh upon Him, that whereas we were unable spiritually to understand GOD, yet through CHRIST, the Word made flesh, we might ascend to the knowledge and spiritual love of Him. Wherefore order for thyself a threefold ascent by devout exercises founded upon the life and death of CHRIST. Let the first ascent be this, that thou cleave to Him with loving inclination and the desire of thine heart, albeit that desire be somewhat carnal; accompany Him by pursuing the thought of His life and death, and by taking delight, throughout thine exercises, in His presence, and in the remembrance of Him. In this first ascent, and in this first affection of thy mind, thou mayest vary thine exercises in divers ways, just as during His lifetime many

56 **The Spiritual Ascent**

followed Him through divers motives and with divers intentions. For the Apostles followed Him in the first place only for their delight in His bodily presence and the refreshment of His talk, being drawn to Him by His sweetness and kindliness. And do thou in like manner follow CHRIST at first in this fashion, and be in His company. Bethink thee how sweet is His presence and what His beauty and comeliness, for He is fair of form beyond the sons of men. Consider His pleasant words and most sweet doctrine, and likewise the manner in which CHRIST bare Him in all things, with what kindliness and benignity He uttered those honeyed words. Ponder also the manner in which He bare Himself inwardly, for He was mild, kindly and gentle from within.

Consider His reverend bearing, His fair aspect; think on the fathomless wisdom that was in the heart of CHRIST, the most beautiful eloquence that proceeded out of His mouth, that most excellent disposition of character that was shown in His outward manner. After this fashion did the Apostles follow Him, but others to the end that He might heal their infirmities; do thou also follow sometimes in this manner, and prostrating thyself humbly adore Him, saying: "LORD, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean," or, "JESUS, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me."

Some followed Him for the sake of His miracles, and do thou too marvel at His might therein, for He doth change nature, transmute the elements, putteth to flight devils and healeth every infirmity. From this learn that He is GOD Who at the first implanted in nature her law of effects, but held this law ever in subordination to Himself, that He might produce at will effects

Of the Three Steps

57

supernatural. In such-like ways mayest thou diversify thine exercises and thine affections in this first ascent.

But know thou that albeit such exercitation is profitable enough in spiritual matters (as, for example, it is a profitable thing to occupy oneself upon the character and conduct of JESUS CHRIST our LORD), yet for the purpose of ascending to His Love this is not sufficient; yea, moreover, such exercise is of little profit in itself. What profit was it to Pilate, to Herod or to the Pharisees, who saw indeed the character and bearing of CHRIST and His bodily presence, but desired not to imitate Him? Wherefore the end of this first ascent, as saith Bernard in his treatise on the Canticles, will be this to thee, namely, that just as the Apostles, being drawn by this affection, did leave all things, the riches of the world and so forth, so thou, too, must persevere in this step in order that this sweetness may take possession of all thine heart, and that it may free itself wholly from every lust of the flesh, and from carnal enticements. That is, in a word, that a man must, in performing these exercises, stretch forth in his heart to an affection towards, and a love for, the humanity of CHRIST in such a manner that every affection and appetite that is in him may have reference to the sweetness of that humanity.

The second ascent, by the Life and Passion of CHRIST, is to go up yet somewhat higher and not only to exercise oneself upon His humanity, but also (as saith Bernard) to find GOD in the man CHRIST, that is to find not GOD only, nor man only in Him, but to understand Him as being alike GOD and man, to love Him as both; to love Him, I say, and likewise to adore. It doth bear much

58 The Spiritual Ascent

fruit in thine exercises upon the Life and Passion of CHRIST the LORD if, so often as thou dost read or meditate upon how He did or suffered this or that, thou canst form within thyself such a concept about Him as shall clearly represent Him to thee as being both GOD and man: that is to say, a concept which shall signify to thee one Person who is at the same time both GOD and man; so whatsoever act of His of the which thou dost read, or upon which thou dost meditate, whether it be in raising the dead or in the working of miracles, doubt not that this was the act of CHRIST the man; and of whatsoever suffering of His thou dost read, be it the piercing of His hands, or the nailing of His feet, thou must believe without doubt that GOD bare it. This is because of His Unity of Person in the which the Godhead and the manhood did subsist without the confusion of their natures—and whosoever is a true Christian doth believe this; but the more clearly a devout person doth apprehend it so much the more fully will his affections be set upon the life, the Passion and the miracles of CHRIST. If thou dost think upon Him as man, from that thought shall come to thee a sweet affection towards Him and great confidence; for He was a man most mild, most kindly, most noble, most gentle, altogether fair, gracious and comely, wherefore thou shalt have confidence in approaching and adoring Him, and shalt more easily apprehend Him, and this because the knowledge of His manhood is more easily acquired, being a thing impressed upon the mind from which the knowledge of His Godhead is very far off.

But if thou dost meditate upon CHRIST as GOD, from that concept of Him all His words, acts,

miracles and deeds shall seem the more dreadful, terrible, awful and marvellous.

So it is that if thou dost understand and conceive in thy mind that both natures were in CHRIST, there shall be born in thee great devotion, love and confidence, and, on the other hand, fear and reverence.

The third ascent, then, is this, to rise to a spiritual affection, now by means of CHRIST's manhood, now by contemplating Him with the mind's eye as Very God, albeit in a glass darkly, and thus to come from His manhood to the knowledge and love of His Godhead. Through this means chiefly is impurity of heart cast out by cleaving to God; moreover, by this perception of the mind, this cleaving and this transformation, a man doth begin to be in a certain manner one spirit with God, to pass outside himself, to perceive the Very Truth, and to be made to be united to God and to cleave to Him. For this cause, Augustine, in the seventh chapter of the *Confessions*, saith: "Now, being admonished to return to myself, I entered into mine inmost heart again taking Thee for my guide, and I was enabled because Thou wert become mine helper. And I saw, as it were with the eye of my soul, the unchangeable light of the LORD shining upon that same eye and upon my mind. It was not that light that is common and visible to all flesh, not, I say, of the same nature, though greater, nor even like the common light grown vastly more and yet more clear and occupying all space. Nay, this light of mine was not that, but different, far different from it. He that knoweth the Truth, knoweth also this light. O Eternal Truth, True Love, Beloved Eternity, Thou art my GOD, for Thee I sigh night and day." Lo, this is the

60 **The Spiritual Ascent**

last ascent in this pilgrimage until a man goeth upward to the essential Vision of God.

But let the brute beast beware that it touch not this mountain, let the unclean take heed that he come not nigh to it, for the beast that toucheth the mountain shall be stoned.

Furthermore, that thou mayest have a means whereby to exercise thyself in the matter of these ascents, here also, as in the steps aforesaid, I have given heed to notify to thee a general method of meditation upon the Life and Passion of CHRIST.

¶ Chapter XXVIII. Of the types and prophecies in the Scriptures concerning the Incarnation of CHRIST.

THE matter of all Holy Scripture is concerned with the work of our Redemption, and all things in the Scriptures are referred thereto. The Old Testament doth foretell that this is to come, the New doth more fully show it as accomplished and fulfilled: consider, then, how many things did precede the accomplishment of that work, in types, acts, deeds, oracles and apparitions that are recorded by kings, prophets and priests, and from this understand the greatness of this work and what thankfulness it doth demand. Consider thine own unthankfulness and disaffection compared with the longing desire of men of old. Ponder over that desire and marvel over the lukewarm affection of thyself and many others toward this work.

¶ Chapter XXIX. Concerning the Annunciation.

BUT when the fullness of time was come that the aforesaid types should be fulfilled, and it pleased CHRIST to accomplish the desire of men of old, the angel Gabriel was sent to an-

nounce to the Virgin that the LORD must be made flesh.

At this rejoice in that the desire of the fathers, and the former oracles were now fulfilled. Think upon the reverence of the angel to Mary; marvel how God did humble Himself; consider how the Virgin was exalted; mark the humility, chastity and other virtues of Mary, the joy she then knew, her exultation and glad devotion; and forget not the ministry wherewith she ministered to Elizabeth.

¶ Chapter XXX. The Life of CHRIST in brief, until the Supper.

FORTHWITH the SON of GOD, of Whose greatness there is no end, was made a little child. Consider how this little one, that was God, did weep and cry in the manger; note well His poverty; mark His humility; marvel at the con-course of angels; turn thy thoughts to the shepherds' watch and listen to the converse of the angels with them. Behold the amazement of Joseph, the jubilation of Mary; mark the face and manner of this most fair man child, but note likewise the inner greatness of the little one. Marvel at His wisdom, and in reverence kiss the manger.

On the eighth day is He circumcised, and is called JESUS.

Consider how, being without sin, He took upon Him the mark of the forgiveness of sins. Be pitiful in that a child so tender suffered hurt, and shed His blood for thy sake. Bethink thee that albeit He wept outwardly, yet inwardly He was shewing compassion to man. Think upon the sweet name JESUS, and take His circumcision as a pattern for thee to follow.

62 **The Spiritual Ascent**

Then a bright star appearing led the Magi to CHRIST. Consider the devotion of these wise men, follow thou them, and with them offer to CHRIST in all devotion whatsoever thou hast, that is to say, thy soul. Think in how great squalor and poverty the Magi found Him, yet did CHRIST not order Himself otherwise by reason of their coming. Mark here the threefold testimony to His birth: first, that of the star; secondly, that of the Magi; thirdly, that of the Jews who forbade their testimony. This do that thou waver not in the faith.

Then did Mary present CHRIST in the Temple, and with the offering ordained for the poor did redeem Him as her firstborn.

Think upon this train wherein were Mary, Anna, Simeon and Joseph; come devoutly to meet them and look upon them; mark their sweet converse and their great devotion, the humility alike of CHRIST and of Mary His Mother.

CHRIST, while yet a Babe, is driven forth by Herod.

Consider His patience and learn to suffer; follow the Holy Family upon their journey; listen as they talk together, and in all things learn the lesson of poverty and humility.

From His twelfth year until His thirtieth He that was Himself the King of Glory abode hidden and in obscurity amongst the people. He taught not, neither wrought His wonders; but though He kept so long silence, yet by that silence He taught most mightily, and by doing naught, He wrought a mighty work, teaching thee not to arise hastily to be a teacher, unless first thou hast sat still and borne thee humbly.

But in His thirtieth year He was baptized of John. Think upon the reverence of John: how he

trembled to touch CHRIST; and of CHRIST's humility Who made Himself subject to John and fulfilled all righteousness, that is to say, perfect humility, and mark how in this matter the whole Trinity of Persons is revealed, and how GOD the FATHER sent forth CHRIST to preach, saying: "Hear ye Him."

Then, fasting in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, He was tempted of the devil. Consider the behaviour of CHRIST in the wilderness, what He did there, and His devout prayers and meditation; likewise observe His humility in that He was with the wild beasts, as saith Mark. Think upon His wondrous patience: He is taken up by the devil, and yet He beareth it. See with what wisdom He did resist Satan, and gave to thee an example of resistance; then marvel at His dignity, for angels ministered to Him.

After this, choosing certain lowly fishers, He in their company took it upon Him to make all the world subject with the sword of His preaching.

Mark His common life with the Apostles, and His sweet conversation; think upon their private talk in the house and upon the way; see how He is amongst them as one that serveth; He doth eat with them from one table and from one dish; He hath no privilege over them, and so forth.

From that time forth He was seen upon the earth, and did converse with men.

Moreover, while He walked amongst men, and sowed everywhere the word of GOD, He wrought many miracles which could not be done save by GOD: to the blind restored He sight, to the deaf their hearing; He cast out devils, He cleansed lepers, and in a word, He healed all and did so many marvellous works that they can

64 **The Spiritual Ascent**

scarce be written. To them that besought Him forgave He their sins; He preached everywhere, He spake mystic parables, in one of which He said that He, the Shepherd, was come to lead back the sheep that was lost.

Now mark this, and consider how often a vast multitude followed Him even so far as the wilderness, a multitude that numbered sometimes four or five thousand. Do thou likewise follow and be near JESUS; look upon His face, and the faces of the Apostles, hear His words and see His miracles.

But since His will was to offer the sacrifice for the which He was come, that He might show Himself the true Paschal Lamb, on the fifth day before the Passover, He, the LORD of heaven and earth, rode upon the ass that was brought Him by His disciples and entered into Jerusalem, the Holy City, in triumph, and with proclamation of praise, while the sons of the Hebrews shouted, "Hosanna in the Highest."

Mark here the deep humility of CHRIST the King; the fashion in which He sate, the adornments which He bare, and what manner of royal troop was with Him. Behold JESUS weeping and lamenting when He came near to Jerusalem and looked upon her, yet mourneth He more over the soul that sinneth.

¶ Chapter XXXI. Of the Lord's Supper.

BUT when the time of His Passion was at hand, He that had ever loved His own loved them to the end; and so it was that being about to pass from this world He made a great Supper and a marvellous, filled with mysteries and pregnant with sacraments, and to this He called the Apostles. "With desire," saith He, "have I de-

Of the Lord's Supper 65

sired to eat this Passover with you"; and in this Supper He did many marvellous things, yea verily, and did institute a memorial and as it were a summary of all His wondrous works, giving meat to them that feared Him to remind them of His marvels, and saying: "Do this in remembrance of Me." As Jerome saith, this last memorial He left us, just as one that goeth on a far journey may give some pledge to him that he loveth to the end that so often as this last shall see the gift he may be enabled to call to mind the kindness and love of the giver; nor can he that hath loved perfectly see the same without yearning and tears. So, too, the SAVIOUR did hand down to us this Sacrament, that we might ever remember how He died for us. Wherefore, when we receive this from the priest, let us be mindful that it is His Body and Blood, that we may not be thankless for so great benefits.

But there are many things that thou must turn over in thy mind with all devotion and reverence in this Sacrament, and that thou must cherish with all piety. Think, therefore, how that in this Supper the LORD Himself, who is mighty and laudable in exceeding measure, did wash the feet of His disciples, and moreover of him that did betray Him, stooping even to the ground and girding Himself with a napkin, which thing was done to instruct us by the example of His humility. Consider the manner in which CHRIST bare him during this ablution, both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly He did wash their feet with humility and great diligence; inwardly He did accomplish His work with the deepest lowliness and devotion.

Look backward, and see that most loving Master and LORD sitting at one table and eating from one dish with His disciples. Think how abundantly in

this Supper He did refresh their hearts pouring into them streams of doctrine. And at the last He held converse with them, and each word thereof burned with fire as though His discourse were flaming with brands of love. But John the Evangelist alone hath set forth a full account thereof: for he saw more clearly than the rest and soared higher than they. Think how he eat the lamb that was His type, and signified to thee in a figure that thou must partake of the True Lamb and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. But above all these things thou oughtest ever to turn with thy mind's eye, and with thy most fervent desires, to the thought of that most excellent of all Sacraments which He did there institute, and to bring back thine heart to the same; marvel at that most bountiful munificence of CHRIST, and the boundless worth of the said Sacrament; but when thou dost call the same to remembrance, let all that CHRIST did for thee in the flesh come into thy mind, for this is what He said: "So often as ye shall do this, do it in remembrance of Me," that is, in remembrance of what I did for thee in the flesh, namely, that for thy sake I was made man, for thy sake I suffered many most bitter pains, and at last for thy sake was I crucified.

But forasmuch as thou art going up an ascent so steep and difficult, and a great part of thy journey, yea and a mighty climb are yet before thee, here is a food most needful to sustain thee in the way by which thou goest up, and for this cause it hath obtained this name and is called Viaticum. Assaith Bernard: "The Body of CHRIST is to the sick a medicine, to sojourners their sustenance; it doth strengthen the weak and rejoice the strong; healeth languor, preserveth health, maketh a man more gentle to reproof, more pa-

Of the Lord's Supper 67

tient of toil, more ardent in love, more prudent in precaution, in obedience more prompt, in giving of thanks more devout. For this cause it is needful for thee often to prepare thyself to holy participation in this Sacrament, because just as this Food, well and worthily received, doth confer upon the soul a mighty and abundant grace, so doth It bring the greater guilt to them that are ill ordered to receive It, and death also, not through any fault in the Sacrament Itself but through the ill disposition of him that doth receive It. For oftentimes the effect of Sacraments is such as to work good or hurt in accordance with the disposition of those that do receive them.

But to the end that thou mayest be able to receive worthily, thou must exercise thyself in three things that are needful to a worthy reception; and the three things are these: purity of body, cleanness of conscience, an effectual devotion. Purity of body sometimes cometh of congruity, but at other times it must needs be sought, and this is because impurity of body is of divers kinds, and each hath a different cause and origin.

Cleanness of conscience is a thing that is chiefly and above all else needful to thee: for which cause before receiving this revered Sacrament thou oughtest by all means to test thyself after the manner aforesaid, and in accordance with the first and second examinations, and so to exercise thyself in contrition, and inflame thine heart to compunction that thou mayest grieve over the sins thou hast committed in thought, word and deed, and likewise over those things that thou hast left undone.

Then approach thy confessor after the manner aforesaid and confess thy sins, especially the

68 **The Spiritual Ascent**

more grievous: yet thou wilt be able, also, to confess all thy sins, both those that are notable, such as do commonly beset thee, and such as are venial.

In the third place, thou oughtest to exercise thyself so as to attain effectual devotion, which doth seem to consist in two things, namely, that thou shouldest have fear and reverence for the reception of this Sacrament, and, further, that thou mayest be moved by effectual love and longing for union with CHRIST. Let fear, then, induce reverence in thee, by bringing forward to thine inward sight the most profound worthiness, the most worthy and dread profundity of this Sacrament; and to the end that thou mayest understand the reverence due thereto, and the worthiness thereof, and mayest not come near to It lightly through lack of fear, do thou consider diligently Who is He of Whom thou dost partake, and who thou art that partakest. For thou dost partake of Him Whom John the Baptist trembled to touch, Whom Peter, the chief of the Apostles, put away from him for dread, and, not daring to come near Him, said: "Depart from me, O LORD, for I am a man and sinner." Dominions adore and powers tremble at Him of Whom thou art about to partake. He it is Who shall be thy Judge, and thou shalt stand for sentence before His judgement seat. He it is into Whose hands thy soul shall come, when she shall have gone forth hence, to be by Him received according to her deserving. See, then, with how great reverence thou must come near to Him, and look well to this, namely, that naught doth offend GOD so much as presumptuous daring and the irreverence that knoweth not shame. Next, bethink thee who thou art: in very truth a man

that is lukewarm, negligent, full of vices. Recall to thy mind what manner of man thou art shown to be by the three examinations aforesaid, and afterward consider that although thou shouldest prepare thyself for a thousand years, yet couldest thou not be thoroughly sufficient to receive this Sacrament right worthily, nay, not if thou wert dowered with every merit of all saints, and didst blossom with all the purity that may be attained by men and angels. How then canst thou dare to approach without fear or without reverence, seeing that thou dost order thyself in thine heart to make preparation but for a short while? Fear lest it be said: "Behold, the hand of a traitor is with Me at the table," that is to say, if (as saith Bernard) thou dost betray CHRIST, Whom thou hast received, by the vices of pride, envy and so forth.

Fear to receive unworthily, lest thou eat and drink judgement upon thyself; yet let not this fear be so great as to shut out desire from thine heart and to take away devotion; for that Bread (as saith Augustine) doth demand the hunger of the inner man; wherefore, also, it is needful that thou have desire and love. But there be many ways by which thou mayest inflame thy desire for receiving this revered Sacrament.

Sometimes love of union with CHRIST ought to set thine affection afire, so that thou mayest be able to embrace Him Who cometh often to thee, with the affection of thy mind and the inmost desire of thine heart. Sometimes the yearning for spiritual health ought to draw thine affection, so that, since thou seest thyself to be filled with concupiscence and passions, that thine own strength faileth thee, and that thou hast no power to make progress, thou mayest bring to

thee the LORD JESUS, that most Holy Physician; for His name is called "JESUS," that is, "The SAVIOUR"; or sometimes, again, the knowledge of the things thou hast done amiss ought to kindle thy desire; for when thou dost perceive how by thy grievous sins thou hast offended GOD and dost read that CHRIST did institute this Sacrament for the remission of sin, it is no marvel if thereby thou art kindled with desire to receive It. Sometimes love and compassion for thy neighbour ought to draw thine affection, when thou dost consider how that through this Sacrifice thou canst succour the quick and the dead and so forth with many like thoughts. But to the end that thou mayest enkindle a yet greater desire and exercise thyself therein, thou mayest turn over in thy mind things that happened in the life of CHRIST; how that He bare the griefs and infirmities of all them that desire Him, that adore Him, that believe in Him. Yea, He carried all their weakness; so it was that the woman who came behind Him and humbly, yet with faith also, touched the hem of His garment, was made whole. She that was a sinner but kissed His feet and was made clean; the Canaanite who followed Him with importunity and the lepers that came near to Him were healed; demoniacs, paralytics, and all deformities of nature, when they drew nigh and believed Him did gain deliverance: for virtue went out of Him and healed them all. Publicans and sinners, coming to Him, gained pardon, nor did He disdain to eat with them.

Wherefore, when thou hast done what in thee lieth, draw near with reverence and fear, but with yearning also and with love, hoping in the infinite goodness of GOD. Likewise, when thou dost order thyself to receive the Sacrament, thou

Of the Lord's Supper 71

oughtest to exercise thyself yet more diligently by calling to mind the LORD's Passion. Let thy mind ebb and flow between these two points, namely, the aforesaid feelings of fear and love on the one hand, and on the other the exercises of devout souls. Some, indeed, sigh more deeply with ardent desire to receive this Sacrament, and come near more often; others, smitten with fear at the dread and reverence due thereto, considering the worthiness thereof together with their own worthlessness, and the peril to them that receive unworthily, do rather withdraw themselves, and for dread desire to get them away from receiving. Yet the disposition of both is to be commended, and it is a laudable thing sometimes to come near being moved by the yearning, and sometimes to put that desire aside through reverence, just as the opportunities of time and place may serve. And (as saith Augustine) what seemeth good to do must be left to the conscience of each several man. But without doubt one thing is a safe rule for all of us, namely, that we must not shut out our yearning nor our hope for reverence; nor, again, may we abandon that reverence and that dread for our hope and yearning, but let us ebb and flow between these two dispositions, having at one time more of the one, at another time more of the other; for the blessed Gregory said: "Naught is safer for us than continual fear tempered by hope." Thy disposition to love is of itself, and speaking absolutely, the more excellent thing; but what is of itself the more excellent may become relatively (and to certain persons doth become) the more perilous and the more to be feared.

¶ Chapter XXXII. Concerning the LORD's Passion and of the three ways in which a man ought to exercise himself thereon.

I WILL go to the *mountain of Myrrh*. And thou, too, O man, if of thy devotion thou wilt attain that mountain (which is the bitterness of Penance) through the mortification of the flesh; and if thou wilt, through hope and fear ascend the said mount and the upward way of purity, if I say thou wilt do so, nothing is more profitable to thee than this, namely, that thou be earnest to collect thy first gathering of myrrh by meditating upon the death of the SAVIOUR. For thence shall come to thee the bitter myrrh of fear that doth preserve thee from the corruption of vicious delights when thou seest that thy LORD ascended this same mountain, that is He bare the pains of Calvary and the measureless burden of punishment for thy sins. And on the other hand, from this source also shall flow to thee by turns hope and devotion, and those most precious unguents that are compounded of fear, love, thankfulness, compassion and the like.

So to the end that the toil may not make thee afraid, nor the bitterness deter thee; that hope may draw thee and devotion lead thee on; that thankfulness, love and compunction may constrain thee to ascend the mount of Purity; first go to CHRIST as thou dost spy out the way; for He may be called, and not unfittingly, the Mountain of Myrrh, by reason of the bitterness of His most grievous Passion. To Him must thou go first of all, collecting eagerly, and impressing upon thine heart devout thoughts of His Passion, to be as it were thy first gathering of myrrh. And this thou doest when thou dost meditate upon that Passion with circumspection, with

Of the Lord's Passion 73

gravity and with devotion, diligently searching out the story of the same, word by word, or meditating upon the purport thereof.

Secondly, thou must go to CHRIST's Passion as a store of myrrh, and take thence somewhat that shall be useful to thee, either as a medicine against the wounds of passion, or an ensample of virtue.

Thirdly, thou must go to CHRIST Himself, and with that first gathering of myrrh anoint thy mind to devotion, and enkindle thy love, and make thyself ready to bear all tribulations. But in order that thou mayest be able to peruse CHRIST's Passion word by word with devotion, and to direct thy thoughts circumspectly, thou oughtest to know this, namely, that such meditation doth chiefly induce compassion, and through that compassion devotion to CHRIST. Now to meditate simply word by word is this: to consider in simple fashion the acts, the bearing, and the sufferings of CHRIST in His Passion. But in order that thou mayest the better draw out thy compassion and devotion by means of this kind of meditation, thou oughtest to give most careful heed to what was said aforetime, namely, that thou must always form as clear a concept as thou canst of CHRIST as one Person, nothing doubting that He both was and is God and man.

Therefore when thou readest that CHRIST bare such and such a pain, made such an answer, or haply kept silence, always think in such fashion, and in thy mind form such an idea, that the name of JESUS may represent to thee both GOD and man, for by this means thou dost look upon CHRIST with more devotion and with the greater reverence, and shalt have yet fuller compassion.

For if by reason of thine human affections thou hast compassion upon a brute beast that doth suffer grievous torment, how much the more shalt thou have pity for CHRIST if thou hast formed such a concept of Him as this, that He was both a man most good, most sweet, most gentle, most noble and most loving, gracious moreover, and fair; and dost also see Him with thy mind's eye as GOD Almighty Whose meed is fear, reverence and adoration, thy Creator and thy Judge.

Secondly, that thou mayest have the more compassion upon Him, and that His sufferings may pierce through thine inward soul with the sword of sorrow, thou oughtest not only to look upon CHRIST as He bare some particular pain, as one that was afflicted outwardly with most grievous suffering, but also to mark this most closely and earnestly, that within He was filled with every sorrow, and had drunken to the full of the wormwood of the bitterness of all creation. First, then, so often as thou readest that any suffering or insult was laid upon CHRIST, do not suppose that He suffered or bare it as any other man might bare or suffer the like; but understand that to Him such a thing was unspeakably different and greater than it could be to any other, and the causes of this difference thou must diligently gather together in thine heart, for they are very mighty to move and lead us to Compassion.

It is known then that any one of the senses is tortured and afflicted by a particular pain in exact proportion to its knowledge that such pain is contrary to its nature; and again there is no doubt but that the senses of each man in proportion as they are more vivacious, do feel pain

Of the Lord's Passion 75

to the greater extent and the more quickly, and likewise are the more tortured thereby. Now by His nature CHRIST was most full of life, and through the dignity of His natural disposition He was pre-eminent for nobility. Wherefore He endured most grievous suffering, beyond that which any other man could know; wherefore behold whether there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

For this cause consider that if to thee, or to any other man of tender frame, it were pain beyond endurance to have his head pierced with thorns, and his whole body most cruelly scourged, how much more must that pain have been most grievous to JESUS CHRIST, who was GOD and man, seeing that His nature was so noble and delicately wrought.

In the second place, CHRIST did suffer to an extent that He Himself chose: for according to the Evangelist it was JESUS that did distress Himself, not the suffering that distressed Him; nay, He did it His very self, and in like manner He was offered up through His own will. Now CHRIST took upon Him this Passion to make satisfaction for original guilt, which was so great as to despoil the whole human race of original justice, to infect nature herself, and to deprive her of eternal felicity. Wherefore He undertook to suffer and to die that He might be a sacrifice sufficient for all men; and seeing that the acts of GOD are perfect, it is altogether evident that the death CHRIST took upon Him was most bitter, wherefore, said Jeremy: "All ye who pass by, look whether there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow," and this as though he said: "Ye shall look in vain for the like." Yea, verily, the Doctors say that His sorrow and suffering were so ex-

ceeding bitter and grievous as to surpass the sorrows that all mankind have suffered since the beginning of the world or shall suffer in time to come.

Furthermore, in the third place, this did increase the sorrow of CHRIST in no small measure that He bare this suffering at the hands of a people upon whom He had conferred so many benefits, and to them might He justly say: "Oh, my people, for I am your God, what could I do for you and I have not done it? and how could ye worse repay Me than by this that ye have visited a most bitter death upon Me?" and so for these things' sake, and because He had compassion upon this people, He prayed: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," that is: "Let not this people administer it to Me," for so some of the saints would have us interpret. Furthermore, the Passion of CHRIST affected every member and every sense: His gracious Hands were pierced, His Head was wounded by thorns, His whole Body was scourged, and in like manner thou canst make scrutiny of every suffering considering yet more carefully each several one.

Likewise His Passion was marked by many acts of most shameful derision, by riot, by scandal, by spitting, by the covering of His Head, so that thou hast never read the like: and this because of the great envy of the Pharisees. And to the end that thou mayest the better understand the bitterness of CHRIST's Passion make this thy rule, that whenever the Evangelist doth recount, without a qualifying word, any suffering that was inflicted on Him, do thou add in thine heart: "It was very great," or "most mighty," or "most grievous"; for example, when thou readest: "The servant of the High

Of the Lord's Passion 77

Priest smote Him," think, "he smote Him most grievously," as beyond doubt was the case, although thou canst not know the exact force of the blow, nor of the suffering it caused.

Now also consider and diligently put together in thine heart the causes of the inward sufferings and sorrows of CHRIST, which haply surpassed His sensible pain. This inward suffering arose in the first place from His fervent zeal for the salvation of the human race, and He then saw that to the morepart His Passion should be fruitless and unprofitable: for though it was sufficient and superabundant for all, yet through the maliciousness of many it could not be all efficient.

Secondly, He had most mighty compassion upon His Blessed Mother whose heart was filled with every bitterness.

Thirdly, His inward pain was made the greater by His pity for the Jews.

Fourthly, by His sorrow for the disciples, and chiefly for the sin of Judas.

Fifthly, by our blindness and ingratitude, for which cause He wept over Jerusalem, saying: "If thou hadst known even thou" and so forth. Behold now and look with a loving eye upon CHRIST set in the midst of His suffering. Read the story of the Passion and consider Him not only as afflicted in the body but as One both within and without all sorrowful, all suffering, all filled with griefs most bitter. It were passing strange if thou couldest look on Him that was God and man so afflicted and encompassed with so great tribulation, and yet wert not moved by the spirit of compassion.

Now as concerneth the second point, namely, how thou oughtest to take the Passion of CHRIST, in a manner profitable to thee, so as to bear

fruit and work thee good, that is to say make thee to imitate virtues and flee from vices. With all thy might thou must direct thine inclinations and understanding to this, namely, to be able to comprehend how CHRIST bare Him both inwardly and outwardly in all His acts, words and answers of the which thou dost read in the story of His Passion, and in like manner the inward and outward bearing, according to their time and place, of the Jews, Pilate and Herod, of Mary the LORD's Mother, and of Mary Magdalene. So shalt thou find, in CHRIST Who suffered, an abundant store of all virtues, and medicine most effectual to heal all vice. For example, when thou redest: "JESUS stood before Pontius Pilate the Governor," then think first of the outward bearing of CHRIST as He stood; for it was with head bowed and with eyes turned to the ground and so forth with other lowly gestures. In like manner ponder His answers and the fashion in which He uttered the words, in what lowly wise, how gently and lovingly He uttered them. Consider the manner in which He bare Himself inwardly in all these things, and thou shalt find Him free from rancour, from envy, from impatience, lowly and meek of heart. In like manner think of the outward bearing of the Jews, how they brought horrible and perverse accusations against Him with loud clamour and most cruel voices, crying out: "He is guilty of death; crucify Him, crucify Him. If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up to thee," and so forth with each several matter. Think likewise upon their inward bearing, and thou shalt find that it was for envy that they gnashed upon Him with their teeth, yea, for mighty envy and wrath that they were stirred up against Him.

Of the Lord's Passion 79

In like manner think upon the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Magdalene, how they bare them in their outward conduct, how sorrowfully yet not with extravagant nor uncontrolled gestures; and this is true in a special sense of the Mother of God who neither then, nor at any time, committed even venial sin through any ill-ordered behaviour; also think of their inward bearing, and thou shalt find sorrow most profound, grief most deep. If thou shalt deal well with these matters, thou shalt find in CHRIST, the Sum of all virtues, matter for thy Compassion, and the proper medicine to heal all vices.

As concerneth the third point, how with this Myrrh of the LORD's Passion thou canst anoint thy mind as with a rich unguent of devotion, and how kindle thine affections to charity. To this end thou must think how that thou thyself, O man, art the cause of so great sorrow and bitterness; wherefore, as is aforesaid, take this benefit as a thing done for thee, as if it were for thee alone CHRIST suffered, for from this thought doth thankfulness arise in thee. He suffered to effect thine illumination, thy redemption, thy justification, thy glorification. To effect thine illumination I say, because He intended that thou shouldst follow His example and so have thine understanding enlightened in the knowledge of the Truth, for which cause take all that thou redest that CHRIST did as done for thee alone, and always think of each thing as it CHRIST were saying, "This I did that thou mightest follow Me to effect thy redemption: because through original guilt thou wast damned for ever." Think, therefore, how grievous was thy sin seeing that for its expiation so mighty a medicament is needed, and so great a price, for from

this thought there is born in thee fear and horror of sinning, and so forth with other matters also.

To effect thy justification; from this thought doth arise thankfulness in that He was willing to suffer so much that thou mightest be held worthy of justification before GOD.

To effect thy glorification; from this chiefly shall love arise in thee, seeing that He had no need of thee, nor did require thy goods, yet was willing to bear so much to gain thee glory.

But since, O man, thou canst not gather this mountain of myrrh (that is, the vast extent of the bitterness) all at one time in thine heart, nor hold it, it is necessary that thou collect it by little and little through divers exercises, and store it up continually. Wherefore, to make these exercises the easier, here have we appended the story of CHRIST's Passion, divided into brief portions that are gathered from the Gospel, and this have we done to make profitable thy meditations, and to be as it were a prop to thine exercises.

¶ Chapter XXXIII. The Passion of CHRIST set forth in brief, and divided into portions.

The First Portion.

SO when that solemn and royal Supper had been celebrated, CHRIST, both GOD and man, arose, and together with His disciples began to hasten to the death that was to meet Him at the hands of His enemies. But upon the way with sweet converse did He instruct and strengthen aforehand His disciples concerning His Passion, saying that when the shepherd had been smitten the sheep of the flock should be scattered abroad. He did strengthen Peter aforehand, and foretold that he should deny Him. Take these things in their literal sense,

Of the Passion of Christ 81

and making devout meditations thereon, do thou above all things worship with reverence and holy sweetness the Person of CHRIST as being both GOD and man; for which cause whatsoever He spake and said do thou hear this diligently with reverence, wonder and pious love. Then for thine own profit and the instruction of thy character earnestly consider with what sweetness He uttered those words; in what kindly wise He bare Him; with what sweet converse He admonished His hearers. Think also how that from the very heart He was sorrowful and sad by reason of the death which hung over Him, and so forth. Next, and in the third place, bethink thee that it was for thy redemption that He now began to go forward to His death, for thee was He sacrificed, and so pierce thine heart to devotion and tears. Ponder these and like things, whensoever thou mayest, after the three fashions aforesaid, for this I say to spare repetition.

After this He left His other disciples, and taking only the three chiefest amongst them, He spake saying: "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death." But then leaving them also He went alone to the mountain to pray, and then after His third prayer, so mighty and measureless an horror and dread came over Him, that for the greatness of that horror His sweat was blood falling down to the ground, a thing that one doth not read of any other man howsoever grievously afflicted. And behold an angel did comfort his LORD.

But going forward without wavering, albeit He dreaded the suffering in wondrous wise, He met His enemies and with a single word laid them prostrate upon the earth; with all patience did the LORD receive a kiss from Judas, and

82 **The Spiritual Ascent**

afterwards was cruelly seized by the Jews, bound and dragged along by them. Then all His disciples forsook Him and fled. First He was led to the house of Annas, where He was grievously smitten on the cheek by a worthless servant. If thou wilt thou canst here exercise thyself yet more diligently by considering who He was that was hated and led along with such contumely, and bethink thee as aforesaid that He was a man most kindly, most meek, most gentle and so forth, but likewise bethink thee who He was as concerning His Godhead, that thou mayest subdue thyself to Him through the assent of thy reason. Wherefore believe and consider that He in very truth was the SON of GOD, the Beginning of all things, the SAVIOUR of all men, He that rendereth their reward to all. Let this then be the first portion of thy gathering of the myrrh of the bitterness of the LORD.

† Chapter XXXIV. The Passion of CHRIST.

The Second Portion. He was led to the house of Caiaphas, where the scribes and priests were waiting for Him.

CONSIDER the manner in which they led Him, how unkindly and harshly, and with what greediness the Pharisees awaited Him, for they were filled with envy. But when He was adjured by the Chief Priest, and had confessed the truth, He was smitten with heavy blows as a blasphemer as though He had falsely claimed for Himself the name of a prophet; He was buffeted when His face was covered; He was spit upon and mocked; moreover, they sought false witness against Him, but none was found ready to hand. He was denied by Peter, who was more hardy than the rest of the Apostles;

Of the Passion of Christ 83

and he, being admonished by the look which CHRIST turned upon him, did deplore his sin most bitterly.

But when morning was come, He was taken through the street to the judge, as if He were a robber, to be condemned to die.

But Judas, seeing that JESUS was being pursued to the death, had so deep grief in that he had betrayed his Master who was so gentle, that for very bitterness and sorrow he hanged himself with a rope. Moreover, he took back the thirty pieces of silver, wherewith a field was bought, as the prophet Jeremy had foretold.

Then the whole multitude of the people ran together, and with much clamour and false accusations He was charged before Pilate.

He was set forth and led through the streets to Herod, and mocked by him as a fool.

Here do thou consider diligently who He is that suffereth; depict Him to thyself that thou mayest have compassion upon One most innocent, most meek, most noble and most loving.

¶ Chapter XXXV. The Passion of CHRIST.

The Third Portion. But as JESUS stood in most lowly fashion before Pilate the Governor, a great tumult and mighty clamour roared around Him, as the Jews themselves cried out: "Crucify Him, crucify Him; we have a law, and by our law He ought to die," and so forth. Then did Pilate order Him to be most cruelly scourged over His whole body; and as if He had unlawfully called Himself a king, He was mocked with much derision being clothed in kingly garb and wearing a royal cloak; His head was crowned with thorns, and grievously smitten with a reed; in mockery He was adored upon bended knees, as though He were a king.

HERE do thou earnestly consider the manner in which CHRIST bare Him, how that Pilate, sitting upon his throne as though he were the lord of the LORD CHRIST and His judge, said: "Knowest thou not that I have power to let Thee go?"

Mark also the manner in which the Jews bare themselves, and look to the cause for which CHRIST suffered all these things, that it was but for thy redemption; how the Jews came in and cried yet the more: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; crucify Him, crucify Him." Then did Pilate, being overcome by fear of Cæsar, render Him up to be crucified; and as He went forth He Himself bare that upon which He should suffer. To the women who followed Him He said: "Weep not for Me," and other words. Here do thou bethink thee how great and glorious was He, the King of Heaven and Earth and the LORD of Sabaoth, Who was thus set at naught with the mockery of kingship, for thus shalt thou be able to go forth to Him

Of the Passion of Christ 85

showing the outward signs of wonderment. He is matchless in might, in beauty, in felicity, in eternity; wherefore marvel how that majesty was made as naught, how that beauty was disfigured, how that felicity was turned to torment, how that Eternal did die.

¶ Chapter XXXVI. The Passion of CHRIST.

The Fourth Portion. When He had been led to the Mount of Calvary, the lictors began to set themselves to crucify Him, to strip Him of His vesture, and so forth with each several matter.

DO thou consider most diligently the manner of this crucifixion, for if they first set up the cross, and CHRIST then went up thereto, think of Him hanging there with one arm nailed and the other not yet; think also of the patience of CHRIST and the manner of His bearing. But if they that set the cross in order did nail Him hereon, and afterward did set it upright, in such case think how CHRIST lay upon the cross, and stretched forth His own Hands, and so was set up. Turn thine eyes upon Him as He doth weep on the cross; there is He athirst; He prayeth for them that crucified Him; He is blasphemed of them that pass by, by the Pharisees, by the thief; a title most true, that may not be wiped away, is written over Him: "JESUS of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

The Blessed Virgin, the glorious Mother of CHRIST, standeth beneath His cross, filled with sorrows, for the more fervent her love, so much the more sorrow did she know.

After a while CHRIST did commit His Mother to John, and then there was darkness over the whole world; and crying: "Eli, Eli," He signi-

86 **The Spiritual Ascent**

fied how great was His suffering and how that in some manner His human nature was forsaken of the Godhead. This was because there was no superabundance of the higher powers which He enjoyed over the lower powers wherein He suffered.

So when He had received the vinegar, and because nothing remained to be done or to be fulfilled, He cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost, showing that so long as He willed He did retain His powers, and that none could take His life from Him unless He Himself should lay it down. This was the chief cause that the centurion, moved by this cry, said: "Truly, this man was the SON of GOD."

Here do thou consider under what form CHRIST did suffer, that thou mayest study to imitate Him. For He suffered as the true Lamb, showing to His neighbour measureless generosity, to Himself the utmost severity, to GOD the FATHER the fullest obedience, to the adversary the greatest prudence.

Do thou, therefore, conform Thy conduct to the pattern of the imitation of CHRIST, that is a pattern of kindliness, of severity, of lowliness and foresight.

Of the Passion of Christ 87

¶ Chapter XXXVII. The Passion of CHRIST.
The Fifth Portion. They break the bones and the legs of the thieves, but not a bone of CHRIST was broken, that prophecy might be thoroughly fulfilled. But one of the soldiers pierced His side, whence came forth blood and water and consecrated the sacraments of the Church. The veil of the Temple was rent, the graves of the dead were opened, that on the day of the Resurrection they might rise thence with CHRIST.

HERE do thou bethink thee how great things CHRIST did suffer on thy behalf and by means of all that is aforesaid, make thy way up the mountain of myrrh, that is to say turn over in thy mind all the Passion of CHRIST and the bitterness and gall thereof, for He suffered insult, evil entreatment, mockery and punishment. So do thou too, by imitating CHRIST's Passion, embrace for His sake all suffering that is full of injury, evil treatment, mockery and punishment.

¶ Chapter XXXVIII. Of the manner in which the devout man, in making his ascents, ought to direct his thoughts to the Passion of CHRIST, so that he may go up by means of fear, make progress by means of hope, cleave to GOD by means of charity, and have his understanding enlightened.

BUT if thou wilt know more fully how that CHRIST's Passion doth beget sorrow and thus doth help progress in the first ascent: how that it doth inspire fear, and so doth help in the first step of the second; if thou wilt know how that it doth raise hope, doth increase charity, doth illumine the understanding and mould the affections, then thou must diligently make inquiry in the Passion and death of CHRIST, and seek

The Spiritual Ascent

out the seven illuminations of truth, the knowledge of which was, before His Passion, partly hidden; but by that Passion the veil hath been rent and the truth opened, so that one may apply thereto that text in the Apocalypse, "The seven seals thereof were opened."

If then thou wilt exercise thyself to fear, and wilt lift thyself up to hope, look upon the first seal that was opened in CHRIST's Passion, which seal is *The Marvellous God*, of Whom it was shown in the Passion that He is Supreme Wisdom Who did so prudently outwit the devil; yet would He not use His supreme power to do him violent oppression.

In the second place it hath been shown in the Passion that He is Supreme Justice, insomuch that He demanded the price of Redemption.

Thirdly, it hath been shown that He is Supreme Pity, in that for our sakes He gave up His only begotten SON.

If then thou wilt exercise thyself to fear, what is more fearful than the thought that GOD is Supreme justice Who chose rather to undergo death than that His justice should leave original sin unavenged. If again thou wilt exercise thyself in CHRIST's Passion, so as to gain fear, hope and charity, diligently read the second seal that hath been opened which is the *Spirit of Understanding* and hath been shown by CHRIST's Passion to be a thing of the greatest kindliness. Note this in the matter of the angels, who permitted their LORD to be crucified.

Secondly, it hath been shown to be a thing of the greatest worth. Note this in the matter of men for whose sake CHRIST was crucified.

Thirdly, it hath been shown to be a thing of the greatest cruelty. Note this in the matter of

Of Meditation on the Passion 89

the demons who did crucify Him. If then thou wilt strike fear into thine heart, bethink thee that thine enemies are so cruel that they did not spare even CHRIST the LORD, but tempted Him and procured that He should be crucified. Wherefore they shall not spare thee, but shall continue tempting thee here, and, if thou deserve it, punishing thee in the world to come.

If thou wilt lift up thine hope, think how that those angelic spirits are endowed with the greatest kindliness; gladly will they carry thine orisons to Heaven, and will pray to the LORD for thee. If thou wilt be enkindled to Love, bethink thee that CHRIST so esteemed and loved thee that He was willing to be crucified for thy redemption. If now thou begin to ascend from thy lusts, and yet this present worthless world delight thee, do thou read the third seal that hath been opened, which is *This world of sense*. In CHRIST's death this was proved to be a place of darkness wherein blindness reigneth, because it knew not the true light. Therein barrenness reigneth because it held CHRIST to be unfruitful. Impiety reigneth there, because it did condemn CHRIST the innocent. By pondering after this manner, thy mind is torn away from love of the world. But if thou wilt withdraw thine heart yet more fully from the delights of the world in which perchance it is still held fast, do thou read the fourth seal that hath been opened, and this is *Hell* which hath been shown by CHRIST's death to be filled with all want, vileness and poverty, for if CHRIST did bear all these things so as to do away sin, much more must the damned bear them as the just retribution of their deeds.

Likewise if thou wilt gain full compunction for thy sins through fear, so that by such com-

punction thou mayest be freed from concupiscence, do thou read the fifth seal that was opened in the Passion, that is to say *The state of guilt* of which thou art indicted. How wondrously detestable to GOD that state must be is proved by this, namely, that for the remission of such guilt so great a price was required, an expiation so mighty, a medicine so hard to attain.

Likewise if thou wilt lift up thine heart by hope (for it hath now been severed in some small measure from love of the world), do thou read the sixth seal that hath been opened. This is the *Paradise of our yearning* which is open by virtue of the Passion, and hath been shown to be a place filled with glory, with joy and with riches, and that because CHRIST was made vile, wretched and poor in order to restore it.

Likewise, if thou wilt enkindle thee to purity of heart, do thou read the seventh seal that hath been opened. This is *Laudable virtue*, and thou shalt find in the death of CHRIST how precious, how fair and how fruitful a thing is that virtue; precious in that CHRIST chose rather to lose temporal life than to do aught that was contrary to virtue; fair because it shone forth in the midst of contumely; fruitful because one perfect act of virtue did despoil Hell, did open Heaven and restore that which was lost.

¶ Chapter XXXIX. Of the Resurrection of the LORD.

BUT upon the third day CHRIST the conqueror of death did rise again, and showed that we should rise also. If, therefore, thou wast moved with compassion when CHRIST did suffer, do thou rejoice with Him now that He is risen.

Think devoutly how that His soul descended

Of the Resurrection of the Lord 91

into hell; think upon what He did there, and upon the joy of the holy fathers and the grief of the devils.

Consider the watch that was kept by angels round His sepulchre. In one place it is said that there was but one angel sitting there; in another place it is said that he was standing; one Gospel saith, "Sitting on the stone," another, "in the sepulchre." Again we read of two angels, yet are the accounts diverse and this diversity sheweth the multitude of angels that were round the sepulchre, and that the women paid divers visitations thereto. Bethink thee that love and yearning did constrain Magdalene and the other women to hasten off thither and visit the sepulchre of the LORD. Think also of the divers appearances of CHRIST, of His sweet converse with the disciples; for what cause desired He to appear in Galilee save to show thee that thou must cross over from sin? Whence this name Passover, that is "acrossing"? Moreover, they were to pass over to Galilee, which doth signify that by the transmigration and changing of our bodies—namely, in the kingdom of heaven—we shall see the LORD after the general Resurrection.

¶ Chapter XL. Of the glorious Ascension of CHRIST.

FORTY days after the Resurrection CHRIST ascending into heaven led captive the captivity of the holy fathers. Think upon the glorious train of them that did ascend with Him, for the saints did follow and angels came to meet Him. Then did they fashion amongst themselves those questions of which Esaias speaketh: "Who is He that ascendeth," and so forth. Think upon the sadness of the Apostles, and of their joy

also; of the angels who did return and comfort them, and learn thou also to ascend to CHRIST, that is by the upgoing afore mentioned, that thou mayest leave thy vices here, for no vice doth ascend with the SAVIOUR, assaith Augustine.

¶ Chapter XLI. Of the mission of the HOLY SPIRIT.

THEN the LORD from heaven did send the HOLY SPIRIT in tongues of fire. See how the Apostles then were comforted, and founded in charity. Ponder the reason for which the HOLY SPIRIT came in this form of fire, why in the form of tongues, why in both forms together, why under other creature forms? And study to hold fast in thee the inner meaning of such things; think upon the effects and the gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT, and many like things concerning His mission.

¶ Chapter XLII. How that in this life we cannot accomplish perfectly any of the three steps aforesaid.

BY these three steps we ascend to purity of heart and charity; for in the first stage we seek GOD, yet we find Him not, that is we find Him not by the way of fervent love.

In the second stage, as we go about the streets of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and in the Tabernacle thereof do offer the sacrifices of loud cries and mighty yearning, the watchmen who keep the city find us, that is to say the Holy Angels, upon whom we look through hope and yearning love.

Yet must we not abide there at rest, but go up yet higher. "When I had traversed them," saith one, "I found Him Whom my soul loveth," that is to say when I had ascended to the third step. So in the first step one doth leave the lust

Perfection is not in this Life 93

of the world; in the second, the mind is uplifted yet higher; in the third, she doth rest quiet in God. But think not that we can go up any one of these steps to reach the Highest and Perfect Good in this life, neither in this life can we purge out all our lusts, for even Paul himself found that he could not do this altogether, that is to say reach perfection, which, as saith Augustine, lieth in having no concupiscence.

Neither, so long as we live can we lift up all our affections, so that none may still abide upon the earth. The body, which is corrupt, doth weigh down the soul, and to dwell upon the earth doth depress the sense which taketh thought upon many things. Much less can we become so pure and seemly that we can cleave altogether to God, for so long as we are in the body we are aliens from Him; but this is the perfect state, and these are the steps whereby our frailty should order its upward way, and make progress by little and little going up so far as it can.

¶ Chapter XLIII. Of the three things by which the spiritual ascent is maintained and moved forward, that is to say, reading, meditation and prayer.

BUT it is not within the power of human frailty always to be instant in climbing these upward steps of the heart, in forming spiritual affections and doing spiritual exercises; and it is hard for one that goeth upward never to slip down, unless he hath a place wherein to rest when he is wearied, and likewise food whereby to be sustained upon the way.

And verily, just as in the matter of the three downward stages afore described, we set forth a discussion thereof under three headings, so as

to bring those downward stages into fuller prominence, so too, now that the ladder of the ascents hath been set up, let us describe the three things that shall hold thee up, enabling thee to take rest when thou art wearied and giving wherewithal to restore thee when thou failest by the way.

Now the three things are these, reading, meditation and prayer; in these three doth every spiritual exercise have its beginning and its progress; these are as it were food by the way, for as GOD hath given for every man's body bread, wine and so forth to sustain it, so also hath He given for the soul during her sojourn here these three things for her refreshment, as saith Augustine.

But reading doth chiefly belong to the first steps of the ascent wherein one goeth forward by means of fear. For reading, as saith Hugo, is for them that are beginners, for verily in the first step they do conceive by means of fear, and give birth to the spirit of salvation.

Meditation doth rather belong to the second step, that is to them that are going further forward, for these being already instructed by reading do know how to walk with themselves in their own hearts.

But prayer, although it doth belong to all the steps of the spiritual ascent, is suitable chiefly, and of its own proper nature, to them that, being on the third step of the ascent, do begin to cleave to GOD. For prayer is an affection of man as he doth cleave to GOD, a familiar and a loving converse with Him.

But let us see how that these three things do move us onward in the ascents aforesaid, help-

ing and sustaining us if they be directed aright and undertaken with discretion.

¶ Chapter XLIV. The manner in which holy reading doth help and sustain them that are upon the upward way, and how it must be ordered and directed towards spiritual progress.

THEREFORE, being smitten or fear, weighed down of compunction and being likewise inflamed with affection and desire for the upward way, do thou undertake thy reading for thy further progress, that is to say, that it may admonish thee to go up and exhort thee to go forward, so that whatsoever thou readest may do thee profit on the upward path of purity and charity, either by showing thee the way of the ascent by means of pious acts and exercises, or by inflaming thine affection to make the ascent; by inspiring fear or by uplifting hope. And so as one saith: "To the Christian philosopher, reading should be for an admonishment, not an occupation."

This shall easily be brought about if, according to the teaching of Augustine, when thou dost desire to read, the beginning of that desire is the fear of the LORD; that is to say, if fear doth rule thine intention and thine inclination, so that thou seek naught save spiritual progress leading to purity of heart, and like that Saint Antony of whom Gregory maketh mention in the fourth chapter of the *Dialogue*, dost not seek knowledge of the words, but dost search after the tears of compunction, so that thy mind being stirred thereby may grow ardent, and leaving things below may reach out to the good things of heaven.

But verily in order that thy reading may be of profit to thee for making the spiritual ascent, there are many things to which thou must give heed, namely, what thou readest, when thou readest, the manner and the purpose of thy reading. Thou must give heed to what thou readest, for books, even though they be useful, are not all alike profitable to him that maketh his upward way. Wherefore thou oughtest to rely upon those writings which do the more inflame thine inclination to make spiritual progress and to climb the ascent, rather than upon those that do enlighten the understanding in difficult and curious matters and whet curiosity, as, for example, those that deal with debateable matters.

Likewise the reading of writings hard to understand doth not refresh a mind that is yet tender, and may sometimes break down the intention thereof; but thou oughtest to read those books chiefly which instruct thee either concerning virtue, or the extirpation and nature of vice; or promote pious exercises and spiritual progress; or else such as increase devotion in thee, and inflame thy inclination toward CHRIST and things heavenly; and if by times thou dost read others for any cause that may arise, thou oughtest straightway to return to those that tend to devotion. For whatever be the kind of writing which thou dost study continually, such also will be the kind of affection thou dost form within thee, such thy feelings, and on such shalt thou often meditate.

Secondly, thou must give heed to the times at which thou readest, for reading, if it is to be fruitful, ought not to be undertaken upon impulse, or upon any chance occasion, but at a proper season, and that a fixed one. Above all things a man

ought to refresh his mind with holy reading to this end that in his exercises he may have matter wherewith his memory may be occupied when no better task doth call him. For this cause reading ought not to keep us occupied upon it as an end in itself, but point us further to devout meditation and spiritual progress, and these by their sweetness and the inclinations they give should direct us further yet to deeds, and preserve us by their delectable operation.

Thirdly, thou must consider the manner of thy reading, for there are some who run through a whole book before they begin to read, others study the beginning of one volume and forthwith go to the middle or end of another, and so they run through all at haphazard. But, as one hath said, it is the mark of a picksome stomach to taste of many dishes, and when these are varied and different the one from the other they defile and nourish not. But do thou choose a book which as a whole may suit thy purpose, inform thy manners and increase thy devotion. This oughtest thou to study in the fear of the LORD and let seemly devotion and due reverence go before thee from the beginning to the end.

In the fourth place thou must consider to what end, or for what purpose thou readest aught; and verily thy chief intention in this, as in all these exercises, ought to be purity of heart and not vanity; not so much to gain knowledge, still less to gain reputation, but to the end that thou mayest gain profit for thyself and for others in what degree thou canst.

Therefore, to the end that thou mayest direct thy reading more immediately to the gaining of purity, thou oughtest always to extract therefrom something that may suit thy purpose, some-

thing that may occupy thy memory, and admonish thee to make progress that thou mayest be like some clean creature whose use is to chew the cud. Yet mayest thou seek other fruits also in thy reading; as, for example, by now reading, now praying, now working; thus canst thou diversify thine exercises avoiding weariness of mind and by this means keeping thyself stable. Strive therefore in all things wherewith thou art wont to exercise thyself to find some delight, for such delight doth help the toiler in his work. In all things be afraid of weariness of mind, and this must be to thee the one end in all things, namely, that thou keep on persevering in thy works and exercises with some feeling of delight therein.

Likewise, to the end that thou mayest direct thy reading immediately to purity, let there be therein frequent intervals of prayer, that through thy reading thou mayest mould thine inclinations, and through these inclinations rise to prayer. In the matter of reading let this suffice.

¶ Chapter XLV. Of the manner of meditation.

BY meditation is meant the process whereby thou dost diligently turn over in thine heart whatsoever thou hast read or heard, earnestly ruminating the same and thereby enkindling thine affections in some particular matter, or enlightening thine understanding. So as thou art ascending, and now making progress in hope, do thou often ruminate in thine heart, turning over especially those things which help thee to progress in purity, which strike terror or increase love in thee.

But to the end that thy meditations may be fruitful to thee, and that thou mayest become accustomed easily to those that are good, thou

Of the Manner of Meditation 99

must diligently consider two things. The first is that thou make provision of useful matters for thy mind, dwelling upon which it may make progress and be occupied profitably. For indeed, as say the saints, thy soul is as a mill which grindeth whatsoever is put into it; but if nothing be put therein it doth waste itself away, and is occupied with things vain and idle.

But if thou set not up beforehand for thyself some fixed and determined matter to which thou canst have recourse when no more profitable duty doth call thee, then needs must thou afford access to any chance thought that thou mayest meet, since the heart doth readily cleave to such chance thoughts, if so be that it is not fixed intently upon any special matter. Again, unless thou have somewhat to which to have recourse it shall often happen that though thou intend to meditate devoutly, yet or ever matter for thy meditation come to mind, the purpose perisheth, the determination is neglected, and it falleth again to aimlessness. But thou hast heard above concerning these matters which are more useful for meditation and profit thee for thine ascent: these are remembrance of thy sins, of death, of the last judgement, of the pains of hell, and again remembrance of the glory of Heaven, of the benefits of God, of the LORD's Passion and anything of like nature.

Likewise thou canst diversify these meditations according to the season, by choosing such as may be suitable thereto, and do subserve devotion the better for that reason, as, for example, when the memory of the LORD's Passion is dealt with and called to mind in Church, do thou conform thyself to the Church by shaping for thyself meditations about the bitterness and Passion of

CHRIST. And do in like manner also upon the other chief feasts, so that thine exercises may turn upon the matter with which the festival is concerned, for such is the council of the blessed Bernard.

The second point is this, that although a man ought to strive at all seasons and every hour, so far as his frailty will permit, to fill his mind with holy meditations, and with spiritual and devout affections, yet (as the blessed Jerome doth advise) he ought to appoint for himself certain special hours at which he may exercise himself in a more particular manner, as it were sweeping up the hearth of his soul, and heating it to spiritual love.

But for this purpose, as saith Jerome, a morning hour is most convenient, because at such a time a man is more grave and better disposed toward spiritual exercises, not yet being involved in the turmoil of worldly things. At this hour, therefore, ought he chiefly to strive to stir himself to some devotion, seeing that it doth often happen that a man abideth throughout the day with just such desires as those to which he stirred himself in the morning.

At this time, therefore, let a man study with all his might to seek a devout spirit from the LORD; or else through devout exercises to produce the same in himself, being occupied with holy meditations, and preparing himself to recite or chant matins.

Let him do the like in the evening before he goeth to sleep, for at that time, when the dread of visions of the night is upon him and when sleep is wont to take hold on other men, he ought to strive yet more earnestly to listen for the soft sounds of the divine whisper, praying to the LORD (after the daily examination which he

Prayer, and Manner of Praying 101

should make at this hour) to forgive him for what he hath done amiss and returning thanks for anything that he hath fulfilled in laudable wise.

Moreover, at this hour, by means of pure affections and devout prayers, a man will get him keener weapons to arm him against the terrors of the night. If at this time thou readest Holy Scripture, let the passages be chiefly such as deal with some matter of devotion and not the historical part of the Old Testament, for this is the counsel of the blessed Benedict.

But as to what hath been said about meditations, namely, that exercise therein should be undertaken especially at fixed hours, this same rule is most expedient also in the case of all exercises, to the end that thou mayest know when thou shouldest busy thyself with some particular one, and when thou shouldest turn to another; and have set times for prayer, for reading and so forth, that all be done orderly. For which cause the blessed Augustine hath said: "The best means of governance is that all things be done in order, each being assigned to his season, lest the sequence of duties being turned upside down confuse a man's mind by being thrown into riotous disorder."

¶ Chapter XLVI. Concerning prayer, and the manner of praying.

AS concerneth prayer, thou must takethis with thee whithersoever thou goest and wheresoever thou mayest be, either in the house or in the field; ever take refuge therein, ever have recourse thereto.

But in this matter of prayer thou must give heed to four things; first, thine affection thereto, that is to say, what affection thou oughtest to

put on and what manner of prayer thou shouldest adopt. Secondly, the character of thy prayers, whether thou shouldest recite long or short ones; thirdly, the things for which thou oughtest to pray; fourthly, thy bearing and attention of mind as thou prayest. In the first matter, thou must know that the strength and virtue of prayer doth arise from the affection of him that prayeth, for GOD heareth the desire of the heart rather than the sound of the lips, wherefore always put on and take to thee an affection and desire that are in accordance with the exercise or meditation with which thou art occupied at the time, so that thy prayer may ever come forth from the root of the heart, not only from the lips of the mouth; but let it come always from the affection that thou dost feel, whether it be of fear, of grief, of love, of wonder, of thankfulness and the like. Do thou, therefore, dispose thyself in accordance with the feeling, whatever it be, as aforesaid. If, in thy first examination, thou hast sifted thyself and found that thy sins are more in number than the sands of the sea, form within thee the affection of lowliness or grief and present thyself as a slave who hath offended his lord, and being thus inclined from thy prayer, say: "According to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences."

But if, when thou siftest thyself in the second or third examination, thou dost find thy heart full of evil concupiscence and vicious desires, again form in thee the affection of humility and present thyself as one that is sick and calleth for the physician, saying: "LORD, heal my soul for I have sinned against Thee"; likewise: "There is no health in my flesh, by reason of the face of Thy displeasure; there is no rest in my bones, for mine iniquities are gone over my head," and

Prayer, and Manner of Praying 103

so forth. But if in the second ascent, that is by fear, thou dost exercise thyself by means of meditations about death or the judgement or hell, take to thee the affection of fear and the character of a criminal standing before the judge in fear and trembling, as if thou wert already found guilty, and plead against the things that should justly be brought against thee, saying: "Condemn me not: enter not into judgement with thy servant: not in wrath, O LORD," and so forth.

But if thou dost exercise thyself in hope by calling to mind the Kingdom of Heaven, take upon thee the affection of love and pray in fervency of spirit, saying: "One thing have I sought of the LORD, this will I require, that I dwell in the house of the LORD," and again: "Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O GOD." And so, also, in regard to the other affections which thou canst form by these same means, for these thou oughtest to put on as thine exercises do compel thee and the power of thy meditation doth demand.

In the second place, thou must know that thou oughtest to make some of thy prayers fuller and others shorter.

By the fuller prayers we mean the canonical hours or other like offices, those, namely, which are of obligation upon thee or which thou dost undertake of thine own will.

But before thou dost begin these prayers, thou oughtest always to do as the prophet doth advise, saying: "I examined my spirit," and so forth; this do until thy spirit is aglow from devout meditation and doth conceive the proper affection and desire, either by means of fear, or sorrow or love, and so forth with each particular motive.

This oughtest thou to do especially before

104 **The Spiritual Ascent**

Matins and Vespers, betaking thee to meditations about the last judgement, thy sins, the hour of death, the pains of hell, the goodness of God or the Passion of CHRIST, choosing the subject that is convenient to thee at the time.

But short prayers are different, being those which the blessed Augustine, in his Epistle to Probas, doth call ejaculatory prayers. These ought we to have in good store continually, according to the wont of the Holy Fathers, and to put forth the same with desire that is ever enkindled, moulding our affections by what we read, and saying: "May the declaration of thy speech give understanding," and so forth.

In like manner let prayer break into thy meditation and into thy work, but in this matter not so great preparation of mind should be made, for this doth suffice, namely, that by the devout meditation wherewith thou art occupied at the time thou lift up thy mind to the LORD.

But in the third place thou must know, that albeit whatsoever is necessary to the body, this must be sought from God, yet much more often, and more fully must we pray for divine grace, for remission of our sins and for the attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven; and also for the purging away of vices and the gaining of virtues.

But above all things, and as it were always, let there be set before our eyes that special vice against which we do chiefly strive, as shall be set forth below, for whose extirpation we ought to pray with burning desire; yet thou oughtest not to pray for thyself alone, but according to the pattern of the Catholic Church, thou must pray by times for the dead in purgatory, and for thy friends if they be tempted, if they be in tribulation, if they be sick or sojourners abroad.

Prayer, and Manner of Praying 105

Concerning the fourth matter thou must know that in the shorter prayers which thou shalt use, very often it is rather expedient that whatever affection thou hast conceived or whatever meditation thou hast formed thou continue therein during thy prayer as if thou wert speaking to GOD who is present with thee, praying to Him for some particular grace or deliverance from temptation, shaping the words from thine own heart just as the affection may suggest, or adopting such words already shaped and set forth as may be congruous with that affection. But in fuller prayers to continue in this method is more difficult, and it is a hard thing, especially for the mind; wherefore it is fitting that thou attend devoutly to what thou dost recite, and that in so praying thou form thine affection and devotion by means of the purport of thy recitation, keeping thy mind from wandering. When thy conscience doth oppress thee as thou prayest, and being smitten with fear thou art afraid to adore CHRIST with faith, do thou, according to the counsel of the blessed Job, turn to some one of the saints and beseech him to pray for thee (now this kind of prayer is called "Postulation"), crying: "Holy Mary, pray for me," and so forth.

But for thy short and long prayers alike have set times, yet oughtest thou to have recourse to short prayers most chiefly when temptation doth assail thee, lest it cast thee down.

Also when thou goest out or homeward pray thus that the LORD keep thy coming in and thy going out, for this did the Holy Fathers, as saith Jerome.

And do the like so often as sin is made manifest to thee, either through the admonition of

106 **The Spiritual Ascent**

another, or by thine own examination of thyself, and so forth, with other matters.

¶ Chapter XLVII. Here beginneth the third ascent by which, through fighting down vices, we go upward from virtue to virtue, and form again those powers of our soul which had abandoned it; and especially of two things which do hinder them that go up the spiritual ascent.

WELL doth the prophet describe the heart of man, that it is high, and one may not reach the summit and topmost peak thereof save by means of so many upward stages. Nor is it any marvel if that same heart is called a lofty thing when the higher part thereof, being well ordered, doth reach immediately to GOD, and is subject to Him only. So that if thou didst stand upon the topmost peak of thy mind, thou wouldest look forth from a place so lofty that thou couldest see GOD Himself, albeit not in Very Essence because of thine own insufficiency and the impurity and weakness which still dim thy vision.

Wherefore the mind of man is a lofty mountain to the which we order an ascent in our heart. Would that the toil of reaching it lay only in the loftiness thereof, and that in other regards the way were safe from foes, smooth and straight for walking in it! But these two things there are which do very greatly injure and drag thee back from the upward way, namely, a multitude of foes that beset the ascent, and also ignorance of the path.

For verily strait is the way that leadeth to life, encompassed on the right hand and on the left by foes who do grievously wound them that go up thereby, discharging fiery arrows at them.

For these foes besetting the path do bend their bows so as to pierce him that striveth to attain a heart unspotted and purity therein. Likewise they do cast impediments at their feet (that is to say, lusts for lower things), to the end that by these snares they may drag them down below, or else hurl them from the King's way to the right or to the left, so that thou shalt see a thousand to fall on the left of that path and ten thousand on the right thereof. For this cause the enemies have conspired together to hide these snares, and have so concealed the same that one would say: "Who shall see them?"

Furthermore, the way itself hath many turnings, for on every side are there many bypaths on the right and on the left close to the road, and these do seem to be good, but the end thereof leadeth to hell. Yet oftentimes the enemies do strive to deceive by the allurements of these bypaths, rather than to overcome by violent temptation. Often do vices put on the splendour and beauty of virtues, and join themselves to those that go upon the upward path, pretending to have come from elsewhere and not from the enemies' side, just as the Gibeonites did deceive the people of God.

¶ Chapter XLVIII. How vices do attack the powers of the soul, and hinder him that goeth upward on the spiritual way.

BUT, as we have said above, the powers and might of a soul (that is the powers concupiscent and irascible) and the affections thereof were given of God to man; so that as often as one desireth to ascend upward or descend downward, the said powers ought to lead him gently on whether he goeth up or down, without toil

108 The Spiritual Ascent

or fear of the enemy. But in the fall of the first man these powers, being thrown into disorder, were made contrary the one to the other, and our enemies have pitched their camp therein. Pride, who is the queen of unrighteousness, the first-born daughter of Satan, now herself doth dwell in the very citadel of these powers; also in the higher parts of the mind and the other affections, powers and appetites, which are by the side of the way by which thou must ascend, she hath set seven guides to guard the way and to watch the footsteps of him that goeth up, that is to say the seven chief sins.

So as is evident from what hath been said above, seeing that the way of thy steps doth lead straightpastthecampofthepowersconcupiscent and irascible, which camp is as it were held by the enemy (that is gluttony, luxury and so forth) by reason of the fall of the first man, therefore thou oughtest to do battle against these vices one by one, that is the vices which now dwell in the powers aforesaid, and continually to strive against the lusts which, owing to the first descent, rise up within us. Thus the third ascent, whose steps we are now setting in order, is as it were ordained to overcome the first descent that was in Adam. Yet doth not this ascent rise to a greater height than those of which we spake before, nay, rather it is collateral with these, or in very truth this upward way is one and the same with those afore mentioned, but the point from which we look thereat is different, and the ways in which we exercise ourselves therein are diverse. But this ascent is that which doth urge us on and aid us in the upward steps aforementioned, making straight the way and preparing it, and without this no

Of the Origin of Affection 109

man can walk in the ascents already set forth.

¶ Chapter XLIX. How some do leave their vices and get them to divers spiritual exercises; and of the origin of affection.

SOME then have erred, and have not found the straight path which leadeth to the city of their habitation; these having put away the vices which reigned within them, did begin forthwith to make the upward way through great devotion and lofty and austere exercises; and they erred because, at an hour when they thought not, they were taken in the snare of the enemy and in the hunter's toils; and too late did they find out that it is no safe thing to dwell with the serpents of concupiscence and with inclinations that are habituated to vice. Indeed, as saith the blessed Gregory: "Some being ignorant of the due order of the battle, neglect to tame their gluttony, and yet they rise up to undergo spiritual exercises, and often do many things which call for great courage; but yet afterward all that they have done so bravely they lose through the enticements of the flesh; and when the belly is not restrained, all virtues are overthrown together by the lust of the flesh." So, too, must one say of other vices also; but this is the safest path, this the most secure devotion, this the sweetest and pure affection, namely, that which cometh when inordinate desire hath been thrust out of the soul and we take delight in inward acts of virtue; for to have true joy in the LORD is this, to rejoice in charity, chastity and humility, but other devout inclinations may sometimes be deceitful. And verily to the end that thou mayest have sound discretion

The Spiritual Ascent

in this matter, so far as sufficeth the present purpose, thou must know that devotion doth mean a sweet affection, or a leaning of the affections towards good, or an incitement which draweth them in pleasant wise.

But such delight or affection may be twofold, or may arise from two causes; for sometimes such an affection is one that suddenly cometh and quickly goeth, although it may by times shake the mind vehemently: and this doth seem to arise from a desire for some object of appetite or love; for example, when there is set before a man something that is delightful, coming either from without by means of hearing, or from within by suggestions; then straightway the affection of love is drawn thereto, and afterward followeth the impulse to pursue this thing, which is called desire, or else the contrary impulse to thrust the thing aside, and this is called hate. Thus they who begin often have a devout inclination to seek good, or avoid evil, and a sweet leaning thereto, and this may come through the gift of GOD, which is often poured down from on high; yet, indeed, it is often so that men most worldly and they who are in mortal sin have like affections, especially women and men that are effeminate; these are lightly moved whithersoever their appetite may lead them, and driven whither their desire would have them go. Very often when such persons hear of the Kingdom of Heaven they are moved by desire thereof, longing to be released, and to be with CHRIST. But often vainglory doth vehemently inspire such yearning which is sweet and smeared as it were with poisoned honey. In this way foolish men are affected when they hear the story of some brave warrior, and their love hath

Of the Origin of Affection 111

leaned toward him for the bravery of which they have heard. Wherefore afterward, when they hear that such an one was overcome or slain, they are moved with compassion, and sometimes weep most idle tears. And just as many men out of an easy disposition do sometimes conceive an affection to some good thing that cometh in a moment and suddenly, so also the contrary is true, and they as suddenly get an affection towards the world, or to gluttony or luxury.

Wherefore, many men are deceived since they extol in divers ways such affections in certain people as if they were great instances of devotion. Yea, more, even if such an affection were toward the glorious Body of CHRIST, one ought by no means to think that the merit of charity and true devotion lay therein, but rather that such an inclination is good and a thing to reach after in so far as by means thereof we root out or extinguish inordinate affections or vicious passions, as was indicated above.

Yet ought not such inclination to be put away but to be held and used as an admonishment to charity and a help against various desires, but the merit of charity and true devotion is not to be attributed or assigned thereto. For this cause Hugo saith in his book on Love: "Nor think thou that a man's love of GOD may be reckoned by his momentary inclinations, but rather by the abiding quality or inclination of the affections." Yet as thou mayest understand from the cause and origin that have been set forth, this desire of the affections, or this sweet inclination thereof, even though they be concerned with the Body of CHRIST or anything of like nature, do sometimes tend the more to make a man less diligent and less perfect. For

the measure of each man's love is not the extent to which he doth feel this desire or the extent to which he seemeth to himself to be in that disposition of mind, but rather to the extent to which he is founded in virtues (that is humility, patience, charity, and the rest) and found faithful in keeping that which is committed to him. For this sweet affection toward GOD is sometimes even a carnal and fallacious thing, and is of humanity rather than of grace, of the heart rather than of the spirit, of the sensual rather than of the rational, so that it enkindleth man more to what is less good, and less to what is the greater; and also to that which he savoureth rather than to that which is expedient. But there is a devotion other than this, when, for example, after long strife and many exercises and with the co-operation of the grace of GOD, a man hath already made vice itself subject to the rule of reason, is clad as it were with a natural affection toward what is good, taketh sweet pleasure in it and doth rest therein. This is not a devotion that passeth away, but hath soaked as it were into the very marrow of the soul, is rooted therein through habits of virtue, and is ever ready to fulfil the good pleasure of GOD whether it be any work or suffering.

If this disposition be accompanied by sweet affection and delight, it is true devotion, and a constant and abiding quality of the will, and by the measure of this ought we to reckon Love. In proportion as thou dost quench vice and make progress in virtue, in that proportion dost thou go forward in this devotion unless it be taken from thee by GOD through His dispensing power.

Of the three things needful 113

¶ Chapter L. Of the three things needful to them that would strive in lawful wise against vices, namely, strenuousness, staid gravity and benignity.

THEREFORE deceive not thyself, nor think that thou canst ascend unless thou study to root out vices. For thou dost not find aught that is good in thyself, that is in thy flesh, but vices themselves that are in thee have pitched their camp against thee, in thy powers concupiscent and irascible, and will only is with thee. For the power to will lieth with thee, wherefore it is needful that the will herself be armed against all kinds of vice. It must be armed on the right hand and on the left, and these be the weapons thereof: strenuousness, staid gravity and benignity. Now, according to Bonaventura, the first of these is defined to be a vigour of mind that doth shake off all negligence, and disposeth the spirit to do good works with vigilance, confidence and carefulness. Staid gravity is a vigour of mind that restraineth all concupiscence, doth make the mind apt and render it fervent to love austerity, poverty and things profitable. But benignity is a sweetness of mind that doth shut out all vileness, and maketh the mind apt to benevolence, to tolerance, to inward joy.

These three things are thine armour, namely, to be strenuous in putting away negligence and strenuous to get thee to work though it be hard and toilsome.

Secondly, be thou staid, and so when thou shalt have undertaken the fight against vice, and dost by thine experience perceive the might thereof in thee (and thou canst not but feel it), yield not nor get thee to flight, but continue in manly wise the task thou hast begun, pursuing

thy lusts most sternly even to the death, yea until they perish utterly.

In the third place be thou benign, and though thou be oft wounded and oft cast down, fall not into perturbation of spirit, to the sadness which is evil, nor to dejection or despondency. If thou hast these three arms, care not that the number be small to fight against the lusts of vice, for victory cometh from heaven and it is as easy to the LORD to conquer by few as by many. Think how Jonathan, son of Saul, with his armour-bearer only, slew very many; how Judas Machæbeus, and his brothers Jonathan and Simon, Gideon also and other brave warriors, did slay many with the help of few, because they trusted not in themselves but in the LORD.

¶ Chapter LI. How that it is expedient or necessary for a man who is going forward in spiritual exercises to have for guide a man that is spiritual.

BUT since there be many ways (as thou dost hear in the matter of the ascents afore described) and amongst them that way that leadeth to life is hard to be known, go not up without a guide nor go forward save with one who knoweth the way and is not ignorant of the wiles of the enemy.

Often GOD doth use to instruct a man by means of other men, and so to admonish him that he take the right ascent and the true paths. Woe to him who trusteth in himself and goeth forward alone, without a guide, for easily he falleth into the snares of the hunter, and having fallen therein he hath none to lift him up. Therefore it is GOD's will that we follow a guide for our humiliation, for it was thus that He lead the whole people of Israel to the promised land by

Of fighting against Capital Vices 115

means of Moses their guide, by whose counsel did the people do all things, to whose admonition did they all assent. In like manner was Lot constrained to go forth from Sodom, and to go up the ascent of the mountain, not of his own guidance, but having a leader that is an angel. So CHRIST instructed not Cornelius Himself, but sent him to Peter to be instructed, and so He directed Paul to Ananias. This, moreover, was the word of that devout eunuch who read Esias in the chariot: "How," saith he, "shall I understand except some man shall teach me?" And in the Scriptures thou shalt find numberless things of this sort. Wherefore, when thou dost set in order in thine heart ascents, as being about to climb up to Heaven, choose thee a guide, a man spiritually minded, and be earnest to perform all thine exercises and fulfil them led by his learning, admonishment and examination. This is the safest doctrine and is approved by the opinion of the Holy Fathers of old time.

¶ Chapter LII. How that he who fighteth against the eight capital vices, doth in a manner strive against all inordinate affections.

IF, then, thou hast gotten thine armour and hast found a guide to go before thee with counsel and direction, it is time to get to the fight, and so thou must strive against all inordinate affections which do arise chiefly because of that disorder of the powers of thy soul which hath been brought about through thy first descent from original justice.

But although there be very many vicious affections which drag thee back from the upward way, yet one is the queen, and there are seven chiefs beside her; from this do all other

116 **The Spiritual Ascent**

vicious passions arise, and when these are overcome and the virtues that are contrary thereto are brought in, in their place, all inordinate desires sink to rest; through strife against these eight the powers are as it were restored, whilst the noxious inclinations are curbed with the bridle of reason. These are the eight which are sometimes called the "chief" vices, being as it were the chiefs whom the rest do follow; and sometimes they are called "capital," because it is of their nature that the others come from them as their head; moreover, these others, whose nature it is to proceed therefrom, are called their daughters.

Sometimes they are called "mortal," because they slay us with the death of guilt and separate us from the life of grace and from God, Who is the true life. Yet are the eight not always mortal, nor even are they so of their nature, and they are these: Pride, Vainglory, Sloth, Envy, Wrath, Covetousness, Luxury and Gluttony.

¶ Chapter LIII. Of the manner of fighting against vices, and how that a man ought not to fight against all at one time, but against some one chief vice.

BUT thou oughtest not to strive against all these at one time, just as thou canst not make all the aforesaid ascents at one time. "Not in one year," saith the LORD, "will I cast them out from before thy face, but by little and little, lest the land become desolate." Wherefore, following the tradition of the Holy Fathers, do thou keep this order when thou art about to enter upon the struggle against these vices.

But in the first place and before all things do thou diligently sift thyself, and seek out, after

Of the Manner of Fighting 117

the form of examination already given thee, what manner of vices there be in thee, either patent or hidden; next what vices are the stronger, and which do most beset thee. Next what remedies are chiefly efficacious against each several vice, and having done this hasten to fight against that one which is hostile to thee above the rest.

Therefore, I say, hasten to fight against this one chief vice, with all thy might strive to root it out, and toward that end chiefly turn all thy toil and care. Ever pray to God against it, and as thou prayest let this be continually before thine eyes; shed tears without ceasing for the quenching thereof, uttering groans and sighs to God with a devout spirit.

Yet oughtest thou not to fight against this one thing in such fashion that thou neglect to strive against other vices, but so fight against this in particular as to feel a general anxiety and horror towards all vice; yea, verily the more boldly and wisely thou strivest against one, the more shalt thou feel horror for vice in general. Moreover, it is expedient that thou know that as in nature the different natural complexions that men have are caused by this, that the four humours (the sanguine, the choleric, the phlegmatic and the melancholic) are intermingled in different proportions; so, too, in different men there are different moral dispositions or inclinations, and divers leanings toward vice or even towards virtue; and this difference doth depend upon the inner man and is caused by different intermixture of the affections, and by the corruption of the powers through the fostering of evil. Thus it is that one is more inclined to luxury and another to wrath, and it is often so that a man hath some

118 **The Spiritual Ascent**

particular inclination which is as it were a store whence all his other vices, or the more part of them, do come. So perchance it may not be absurd if this be called his moral complexion. Thus, one is sad, another doubtful, a third confused of mind, a fourth full of scruples, a fifth querulous, to a sixth his exercises are irksome, a seventh is overbusied. Now all these things, as it should seem, proceed from some ill disposition within, either of the soul or of the organs, and in their own fashion are not unlike to melancholic affections of the body.

But another man will be given to hilarity, to wandering, to cheerfulness, to loose living and so forth. And each man ought diligently to inquire into his inward state after the manner above set forth, and in accordance therewith to order in his heart his ascents to virtue; in his exercises to ordain remedies against vice, always to be suspicious concerning that vicious inclination which is in him; and in every way to bridle it that it obey reason.

But when by devout exercises and manful striving thou shalt have fought down that one vice of which we have spoken above, so that it obey reason and presume not to contradict her, and so that if even it rise up again it is straightway bridled of reason without a struggle, then with like diligence thou must seek for another vice which doth especially beset thee, and fight against it in like manner. But think not that thou canst so tear out every root of any vice which is in thee that from that time forward there shall be no need to strive against it even with general solicitude and horror; for, as saith Bernard, vices, though they be lopped, do sprout again; though put to flight they do return;

How one must Fight 119

though quenched they blaze up afresh; and put to sleep they rouse them anew.

¶ Chapter LIV. How that one must fight against vices in different ways corresponding to the diversity of their nature; and of that in which this diversity doth consist.

FURTHERMORE, it is expedient that thou know the proper manner of fighting against vices, and that the one must not fight against the eight aforementioned, nor against those vices which proceed from them in such a way as to use the same method in every case, but just as the nature of these is diverse so, too, the methods of fighting against them must be different.

In the matter of carnal vices, thou dost overcome these better by avoiding every occasion thereof and by taking away the sustenance whereby they live in thee; but for spiritual vices, thou wilt better cast them out by seizing the occasions upon which they are stirred up, and boldly resisting them.

In the next place do thou further consider another diversity, and the varied nature of vices, for there be some which always arise out of others, and come not of themselves but with another vice to lead them, such, for example, is envy.

Do not thou then strive against this secondary vice so much as against that from which it doth take its origin.

In the third place consider another diversity, and the nature of temptations, for there be some vices which do lead evidently to evil, and the intent of these is to overwhelm the soul by their onslaught (such are luxury or wrath), and these oughtest thou to resist with toil and suffering. But there be others which do not assail directly

by their own assault, but by seducing the soul do deceive it. Now vices of this kind are very often even contrary to the appetites, as, for example, the temptation to excess in watching, fasting and the like, and here there is need rather of discretion than of fortitude, wherefore, as saith Bernard: "In this particular to have known is to have conquered, and faith is victory."

But there be other vices besides, which assail both by their own onslaught and by wearing the appearance of goodness, as, for example, an inordinate affection to preaching, which doth seduce by wearing the cloak of a zeal for souls, and urgeth one on through the lust of praise and the desire of reputation. Now this is a most perilous temptation, wherefore in this matter one must in the first place know and believe that it is a temptation, yet to know or to have known this is not to have conquered, but one must also bridle the attack thereof by toils and exercises.

¶ Chapter LV. How there be three ascents to overcome each vice, that is three ways of going forward to the opposite virtue.

HAVING premised this for thy caution as concerning the strife against vice in general, let us now come down to the particular struggles against each vice severally.

In the first place, thou must know that whatever evil thou dost choose to fight down, against this shouldest thou ordain ascents in thine heart, and certain steps by which to go forward, to the end that thou mayest know how far thou art going up to virtue, or how far going downward to vice.

So then thou mayest distinguish between three steps whereby any vice is overcome; of these the

Of Overcoming Gluttony 121

first doth belong to them that are beginners, and pertaineth to the first step of the upgoing towards purity of heart, and this lieth in fear.

The second doth belong to them that are making progress, and pertaineth to the second stage of the second upgoing, and this lieth in hope.

The third step doth belong to them that are finishing their course, and pertaineth to the last step of the upgoing towards purity.

¶ Chapter LVI. Of the upgoing which overcometh the first vice which is gluttony.

BUT the first struggle is against the vice of gluttony. In the beginning it was by this that the devil tempted and overcame the first man, this was his first temptation to the Second Man and therein the tempter failed. Moreover, this vice lieth as it were at the very threshold of nature. If then we cannot overcome this, how may we overcome the spiritual vices which war against us, seeing that these last are beyond the confines of our carnal nature?

Now against this vice we go up by means of the virtue of sobriety, through the which we ordain ascents in our hearts to overcome this gluttony which must be vanquished.

By sobriety is meant that virtue by which the sustenance for our body is given thereto with proper moderation, and thou oughtest to set in order these steps, that is a threefold ascent, in thine heart to overcome the vice of gluttony so as to be able to bridle the appetite thereto, and (so far as this is concerned) to reform the powers concupiscent. But the first ascent against gluttony, that is the first step to the virtue of sobriety, is patiently to endure when thou canst not have savoury food and drink, and not to be sad if

sometimes thou mayest not have thy desire to the full. But in this step the gluttonous man doth suffer much strife and many darts of this vice, wherefore he hath need to stand some while, and to fight and overcome his gluttony. Know therefore that the nature of gluttony is such that it doth cause an inordinate appetite for meat and drink in the power concupiscent whereby a man is hindered from the upward way; and this inordinate affection or appetite doth constrain some to eat before it be time, and others to eat extravagantly, that is, to expend too great desire and to be prodigal in their eating; others, again, it doth constrain to seek inordinately for delicate meats, and driveth some to exceed in quantity.

But that thou mayest recognize the whole family of this vice, and know that against which thou oughtest to fight, consider this that the most notable daughters of gluttony, according to Gregory, are scurrilous speech, overmuch talking, detraction, vituperation, foolish jesting, lascivious thoughts and carnal impurity. But to the end that thou mayest be able to cleanse and purge away this affection to impurity whereby through our inclination we lean to a vicious desire for food, thou must give thy mind generally to the expurgation of all carnal vices, considering this that there are in the soul three influences that move one corporally, namely, the natural force, which is the motive power of the humours, and from this gluttony and luxury do often take their origin; secondly, vital force, by the which a man doth exercise his vital motions; thirdly, the mental force by which he doth exercise his imagination, thought and so forth. Now the more that the mental force is relaxed and the less a man doth exercise it, so much the more is the

Of Overcoming Gluttony 123

natural force extended and increased. Thus it is that men given to accidie, lukewarm persons, and such as have no inward delight in meditation or in spiritual desires, are chiefly in peril of falling into carnal vice, whence Solomon saith that every idle man is filled with desire; and, according to Cassianus, it is for this reason that the glutton knoweth not how to think of aught save meat and drink and the things that concern the belly. And again Chrysostom saith that it is for this reason that women are chiefly tempted to carnal sins, because they are inwardly less occupied than men; wherefore the same saint saith of luxury that it is a passion which belongeth to an empty mind.

But on the other hand, in proportion as the mental power is extended, so is the natural power relaxed, as is seen in the case of studious persons; and it is for this cause that the blessed Jerome saith to Rusticus: "Love to know the Scriptures and thou wilt not love the vices of the flesh."

So the more a man is intent upon some inward and outward employment or care, taking delight therein, so much the more will he overcome carnal vices; wherefore the remedy against gluttony and likewise against luxury is care in all things and an outward affection towards GOD, for example, compunction which is very mighty to overcome both these sins. In like manner devotion is useful, or holy reading, or any outward occupation, so that they be accompanied by inward affection; with these and like remedies must thou strive against gluttony, till at length thou dost rise to a higher stage, which consisteth in this that thou go forward so far that not only dost thou determine with a ready will, but also art able, with no opposition from thine appetites, to

124 **The Spiritual Ascent**

abstain from such pleasant meats as thou couldst obtain, and to be content with simple and common victuals, keeping away from such as be delicate, say from wine and so forth. Upon this stage thou dost stand more safely, but yet thou art not altogether free from assaults, though they be weaker.

In order that going forward from this point thou mayest come to the third ascent, thy lust must be trodden underfoot by aid of the remedies aforesaid, by fasting, by watching, by reading, by frequent compunction of heart; groan over those desires by the which perchance thou dost remember that thou wast deceived or conquered; be enkindled now with horror of vice, now with desire for perfection and integrity, and so at last thy mind, being alike occupied and held by cares and meditations of this kind, may perceive that the refreshment of victual is not a thing permitted for her enjoyment, so much as a duty added to the burden of life, understanding that such refreshment is rather needful to the body than to be desired for the soul. Then dost thou touch the third ascent, namely, when thou shalt have put on this affection. But the third step and ascent is that which is made when a man hath so tamed his gluttony, and so reformed his power concupiscent that he can abstain without any difficulty from the pleasant meats that are within his reach, and can be content both in the quality and quantity of his food with what is needful, and the simpler his victual the more is he content.

But when thou hast overcome gluttony, set in place thereof sobriety, which may keep diligent watch over thy victual in the matters of its kind and amount. As to kind, let thy sobriety see to

Of Fighting the Vice of Luxury 125

it that thou seek not delicate nor unwonted meats; as to amount, that thou exceed not due measure; for though the capacity of each man doth differ, yet for all there is one bound of moderation, namely, that whatever his capacity may be it must not be burdened by greediness. Especially let sobriety look to this, that regular and moderate fast be kept.

¶ Chapter LVII. Of the upgoings whereby one must fight down the vice of luxury.

IN the second place thou must set in order upgoings against luxury, that thou mayest prevail to overcome it, and verily this vice setting her throne in the power concupiscent doth not suffer any of whom she hath full hold to make his ascent, but causeth him like a brute to wallow in his own filth.

But against this vice we go up and conquer through the virtue of chastity, who is the daughter of that sobriety which did overcome gluttony; for by sobriety chiefly is she nurtured and made to grow. But this same chastity is a heavenly thing of mighty origin; this have the Holy Angels learned from the LORD Himself, the very fount and origin of all things; this did CHRIST bring down to earth from heaven, and for the imitation of all He set forth His Mother, the glorious Virgin, for she was the very disciple of chastity.

Now we go up against luxury, and utterly overthrow it, by means of a threefold ascent or three steps of progress. The first is continence restraining us from carnal acts, giving us the intention to be constant, and refusing assent to any unlawful impulse.

While making this ascent, a man is yet in the toil of battle, and is not far from his enemies,

since his will alone doth choose chastity, and his affections do fight against it. Wherefore it is expedient that, being set on this step, thou arm thyself manfully to fight; for to overcome this vice, a long and fierce battle must be fought against other vices, yea, a battle all day long. But to the end that thou mayest know how to fight against luxury, thou oughtest diligently to consider the nature of the vice and the manner in which it doth assail thee. Now it hath a twofold nature, the one on the side of the flesh, the other on the side of the spirit; in the former regard it hath the nature of an impulse in the flesh and power to stir the same and rouse it, but on the side which looketh to the soul, it doth engender an inclination towards women and a leaning to them, bringing in thoughts of them, familiarity with them, and so forth.

According to Gregory, luxury hath seven daughters: blindness of mind, carelessness of death and hell, inconsistency of thought and desire, love of self, headlong inclination to sin, hatred of God, love of this present world, and despair of the world to come. But that thou mayest conquer these motions and affections, thou must diligently consider that this vice (as saith Chrysostom) is the passion of an empty mind, that is of a mind that is without exercises or desire thereof. Wherefore, the more thou dost fill thine heart with fear, solicitude and compunction, the less wilt thou be tempted, and it is for this reason that in sleep, when the powers of the mind are bedrouzed, this brute beast doth the more assail.

Then as to particular remedies, note this that sometimes the vice doth shew herself more on the fleshly side, at other times more on the spiritual;

Of Fighting the Vice of Luxury 127

and when it is upon the fleshly, it doth stir up affections in the spirit, and conversely, when it is in the spirit, it doth straightway move the flesh. Yet there are certain remedies which are mighty to heal this vice, when it is in the flesh, namely, fasting, which is the chief remedy, and likewise the labour of the hands, watching, toil, tribulation, and so forth; but when it is in the soul the remedies are these: contrition of spirit, devout prayer, frequent and holy meditation, solicitude of mind, spiritual exercises, earnest and absorbing occupation both of mind and body; likewise to keep watch over the senses when thou art in the street, or in the house and so forth, to have control over thine inward thoughts, to have no familiar intercourse with women, to avoid speaking with them alone, or in private (for this is Jerome's counsel), and to abstain from frequenting their houses. Also humility and gentleness are of great avail, wherefore the wise man said: "When I knew I could not otherwise be continent, I went to the LORD and besought Him."

Although no triumph over any vice can ever be gained without humility, yet in this particular case we have special need of divine grace, wherefore practising thyself in these and like exercises, thou dost at last ascend higher, namely, to the second step of chastity, and the second stage forward that doth overcome the vice of luxury. But this second step is reached when by the maceration of the flesh, and the other exercises aforesaid, thine affection is made clean, and the flesh so subjugated to the spirit, that it is less often tempted, and temptation when it cometh doth yield with but slight toil, so as to obey a word rather than cease after a struggle.

Yet above this there is a third and an higher

step, which is reached when after long-continued exercises and much labour, and also through the co-operation of the Grace of God, thou hast so tamed the lusts of the flesh that they are felt but very seldom and very lightly, and hast so put on the affection to and the love of chastity, as to be filled with horror and detestation of all the motions of the flesh, and to be as it were sickened thereby.

¶ Chapter LVIII. Of the upgoings that overcome avarice.

IN the third place thou must set in order upgoings to overcome avarice, doing this by means of contempt of riches, and the virtue of poverty; and as in the ascents afore set forth, there be three steps upward; the first is not to desire to have aught that is unjustly gained, to do alms of such things as be gained justly, and not to abuse one's own possessions for vicious ends. But if thou wilt tear out this vice of avarice by the very roots, then having victual, clothing, and a roof to cover thee, therewith be thou content. Yet verily this is the chief remedy, namely, to leave all for CHRIST's sake, and to spend one's life under the charge and oversight of another, and not to claim ownership in anything even to the least extent. Another remedy also is trust in God who doth not desert them that hope in Him.

The second step is not only to be content with what is justly ours, but to be satisfied with bare necessities, to desire no superfluities in food, vesture, or lodging, and so on in each several matter.

The third step is to possess nothing in this world, nor to desire aught therein, and often to

The Ascents to overcome Wrath 129

endure penury even in the things that are needful.

Now the daughters of avarice are six: treachery, fraud, wandering, perjury, restlessness, and an heart that is obdurate against pity.

¶Chapter LIX. The ascents to overcome wrath.

WHEN these three vices are overcome, being the chief affections to concupiscence, do thou next go up to overcome the power irascible, and to purge it; and in the first place there doth meet thee the task to set in order thine ascents to overcome the vice of wrath, for one may go up against this by a threefold ascent or progress through the virtue of gentleness.

The first step is that a man learn to overcome the impulses to wrath by striving against them and so to repress them that they break not out through unlawful words or acts.

Now the nature and impulses of wrath are threefold according to Gregory; for some it doth move suddenly and quickly fadeth away, others it doth move more slowly, and when they are stirred wrath doth not quickly leave them; others, again, it doth move quickly and leave more slowly. Now the daughters of wrath are these: strife, riot of mind, contumely, clamour, indignation and blasphemy.

Wherefore, when we are set upon this first step, let us repress ourselves, so that when we feel the motions of wrath we break not out. But to the end that we may do this the better, we ought continually to consider beforehand how to deal with those hindrances which may meet us and be the occasion of wrath, so that or ever they come we may be forearmed with the shield of patience. Likewise for this purpose it doth profit us to

spend toil upon repressing and smothering in our hearts the flame that is there enkindled, and it is good that a man turn to other business so as to forget his perturbation. Furthermore, it would be a mighty remedy if a man were to be so composed of mind as to be able to take counsel concerning the many ills that do follow wrath. This vice doth hurt the conscience, throweth into confusion purity of heart, driveth away pity, causeth scandal to one's neighbours, doth overthrow good report.

Likewise compunction is a poison to wrath, for, as saith Climacus: "As water doth put out fire, so the flowing of the tears of true grief hath such a nature as to slay and put out all the fire of rage"; and earnest meditation about death likewise doth curb wrath.

By these, and by like exercises, doth a man go forward, until he touch the second step of gentleness or patience, which is reached when one being taught by use and the habit of bearing things contrary to his desire, and of curbing his impatience, hath learned not to be afraid nor disturbed by opposition, but doth look upon the enemy standing round, himself unshaken as one that is in a strong tower.

But the third ascent is to rejoice in tribulations, to glory when these are present with him, and when they are absent to desire them.

¶ Chapter LX. The ascents that lead to love of one's neighbour and to the overcoming of envy.

THE ascents that lead to the overcoming of envy are these, namely, further progress, and the steps of the love of one's neighbour. Now the first of these is this, to hate no man nor to desire ill to any, not to desire to hinder

The Ascents to overcome Envy 131

the good of any, not to withdraw from one's neighbour help and aid in his need, and in a word not to let one's will consent to the doing or desiring of evil to any man; and further, let each choose his neighbour's good, doing as he would be done by if he himself were in need. But charity, as hath been said before, being the virtue to which we go up chiefly by love for one's neighbour, is herself the end of our ascents. Wherefore, just as nothing is to be higher esteemed than love of GOD and of one's neighbour, so naught is to be more condemned than envy. Wherefore, before all things, we must keep unity and peace, for in this lieth the bond of perfection. There is nothing in which the Holy Angels do so much rejoice, there is nothing whereby we may so fully picture the similitude of the New Jerusalem than that we keep charity and unity of heart, saying the same words, feeling the same motions, being careful not to hurt the consciences of others by any stumbling-block, by singularity, by strange practices, or by the presumption of unaccustomed behaviour. For this cause was it that CHRIST, when about to depart from us, did so often repeat the same commandment, that He might impress it the more deeply. "In this," said He, "all men shall know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another."

Wherefore let us above all things drive out this vice of envy, a thing that is fitly ascribed to demons, for it was through the envy of the devil that death entered into the world, following Satan who was on the side of death.

But the chief remedy against envy is to love none of those things that the world loveth, namely, honour, riches, or pleasure, for in proportion as we love anything that is earthly, in that

132 **The Spiritual Ascent**

degree are we stirred to envy, if we be hindered from it by any. But note this, that the impulse to displeasure at the good of another is not in all cases properly called envy, for sometimes we are displeased at the good hap of another in so far as it doth tend to our own hurt, or that of other men, as, for instance, I may look jealously on a man because of his master who is a tyrant and doth oppress others unjustly. This impulse doth always concern some temporal advantage, and is sometimes good and at other times vicious.

Sometimes, also, I may have an impulse to displeasure at another's good hap, or be saddened thereby, not because he hath it, but because I see that I am in lack of that good thing, and this is sometimes an wholesome zeal; thus it is that Jerome would have us envy one another's virtues and strive who should be the humbler and the more obedient.

Thirdly, my displeasure at another's good may have reference to the degree in which such good doth diminish mine own glory or honour, and this is in the strictest sense envy. This doth not subsist between persons whose condition is far apart, because the glory and honour of a man who is far removed and high above me doth not diminish mine own; just so the clown envieth not the king his glory, and yet it may be that the king's brother, who might himself be chosen to be king, doth envy it; so Esau hated Jacob, and so Absalom did envy Solomon.

But the daughters of envy who proceed from her, are hatred, theft, detraction, triumph in a neighbour's adversity, and affliction at his prosperity.

The second remedy is for a man well to weigh this consideration, that even if another did lack

The Ascents to overcome Accidie 133

this good thing for whose sake he is envious, yet he himself would not have it; also to fear the vengeance of God, Who doth not forgive a man his offences, unless the offender doth forgive his neighbour; and again this is a remedy, that one study to be more serviceable, affable, and kindly to that person whom he doth hate.

But the second ascent to overcome envy, and the step forward to love of one's neighbour is this, so to rejoice in another's progress, and to love that other's good as if it were our own; so to have compassion on his adversity as if we suffered it; and through the affection of brotherly love to count another's gain as ours.

But the third step upward is to be so disposed as to love our enemies and to be influenced by the same sweetness toward them that hate and persecute us as if they were such as were specially beloved; and to be ready to give not temporal goods only, but even to offer our very body for the brethren.

¶ Chapter LXI. The ascents whereby we overcome and cast out accidie (sloth).

JUST as love for our neighbour doth cast out and destroy envy, so by ascending to the love of God we do overcome accidie, and the sadness which is evil. For the love of God is fervent in operation, and if it be love it worketh mightily, but if it refuse to work, it is not love. In like manner the outcome of charity is joy in the HOLY GHOST, which overcometh sadness, but the first step toward the love of God is to love what is given thee, and to use it in such a manner that unlawful things are avoided; and when thou art set upon this step, thou doest only the things necessary to salvation, taking heed lest accidie

so cast thee down that thou neglect the things needful to be done, or ordained upon thee by precept. But this step is a low one, and it is not good to abide long thereon. For this cause it is needful that by continual exercise in good works thou break thyself down, resisting thine accidie, and inflaming thine affections by those good deeds and by holy exercises; and the purpose of this is that at length thou mayest gain delight in, and an affection towards, such holy exercises and good works; so now thou doest not only things necessary to salvation, but being enkindled to a fuller and more fervent affection, thou dost begin to do all the things that are of GOD (thine accidie being in part vanquished), and to be zealous in doing them, yea, and moreover, in following counsel to the full.

Herein thou goest up the second step of the love of GOD, and overcomest accidie of mind. But so long as thou art assailed by this vice, and hast not yet reached that step, know thou that the chief remedy against accidie is never to yield, but always manfully to resist.

To the end that thou mayest know the nature of this brute beast, consider that the influence and tendency of the vice lead chiefly to two things, namely, that thou change thy place and vary thine exercises. It doth bring about thine change of place in the manner following: first of all it doth weigh down and depress thy mind with weariness and taketh away all delight in things spiritual; but the soul cannot bear to be without delight, wherefore she doth straightway turn her to sighing after carnal refreshment, and to a desire to leave that place in which she hath no pleasure; so this doth cause in thee an horror of the said place, a distaste for thy cell, and for

The Ascents to overcome Accidie 135

every good thing, especially such as be spiritual. Sometimes, moreover, the mind doth snatch eagerly at carnal delights, that she may be less occupied with those of the spirit; and then at the last a man doth begin to praise places that are further off, and to call the brothers who dwell there blessed, and also to conceive a kind of contempt toward them that dwell where he is as though they were less spiritual. So it doth come about that his mind being inclined to weariness and finding no comfort, he doth straightway desert his post or falleth into somnolence or dissolute manners; and seeking solace from time to time, he changeth his exercises thus, albeit he hideth his motives beneath some cloak. For when the mind is weighed down by such exercises, it doth devise for itself others that are lighter, extolling these more highly and deeming them more meritorious, as, for example, visiting the sick, or building a monastery, in the which he that was a worthless and indolent disciple may become a yet worse master and rector.

So if thou wilt overcome accidie in lawful wise, above all things, change not thy place, for the more thou dost so change the more shall thy mind be unstable in things external, and the more given to accidie in things spiritual, for which cause Bernard saith: "It is impossible for a man's mind faithfully to attach itself to any one thing, unless first he shall have attached his body in constancy of purpose to some one place; and he that doth strive to avoid a sick mind by fleeing from place to place, is as one that fleeth from the shadow of his body."

Moreover, as to the greatness of the ills which come when a man doth lightly change his exercises, of this we have spoken above.

136 **The Spiritual Ascent**

Now the daughters of accidie are six, according to Gregory, namely, malice (that is, a desire to devise evil things), despair, pusillanimity, rancour (that is, inveterate hate), sluggishness concerning the precepts of God, and a mind that wandereth among things unlawful.

Compunction would have mighty virtue against this disease, if so be that a man given to accidie could acquire it, for as saith Climacus: "He that sorroweth over himself knoweth not accidie," and he saith again, "Let this tyrant be bound with the fetter of the memory of our offences and sins, let him be beaten as with rods by the labour of our hands, and dragged away by intent and close meditation concerning the good things to come."

Likewise, variety of occupation hath great virtue to overcome weariness of heart, as that a man pray for a while and then read for a while, until he gain some desirable affection, and so constrain himself to continue in those acts whereby he is most chiefly wearied.

But if a man be strenuous, strict and cheerful in his devout exercises and holy acts, and if he bestir himself in such for a great while and with perseverance, at length he doth begin to hope, to make wider his affection to love, and after a fashion to yearn toward God, as being unable to live without Him, being constrained by the desire to be released and to be with CHRIST. And this is the third step of the love of GOD which doth overcome accidie. But evil sadness hath a double meaning, for sometimes the word is used generally, just as we speak of all passion in general terms, and in such case the origin thereof is difficult to comprehend; but under another aspect it is a torpor and a wearisome heaviness

The Ascents against Vainglory 137

in spiritual things, and in such case it may be comprehended under accidie, and we go up to overcome it by the steps of the love of GOD, for the outcome of that love is joy.

Now the remedy against the sadness that cometh of despair is the remembrance of the kindness and mercy of GOD and the perception of His benefits. Secondly, let a man have access freely to good company, where men speak of GOD and the things of the Spirit. Thirdly, that He remember the counsel of James, that if any be afflicted, let him pray with a calm mind and sing psalms.

But as concerning the sadness that is good, this hath been made plain enough in what hath been said about compunction.

Chapter LXII. How we go upward against vainglory to put it out.

THERE is no virtue that is the opposite of vainglory, wherefore there is none whereby we may go up so as to overcome it, or set in order steps to vanquish it; nay, rather this vice herself is begotten of virtue and strengthened by good works; her motions first do show in carnal things, fair vesture, high lineage and so forth, and yet though a man may not overcome her directly by virtue, he doth supplant her by means of humility. Whithersoever thou dost throw this caltrop, it doth stand with a spike erect; whatsoever thou doest, howsoever thou dost behave thee, this spike doth penetrate and goad thine heart to vainglory.

But her daughters are seven, namely, disobedience, sullenness, boasting, hypocrisy, obstinacy, strife, the presumption of strange behaviour and the invention thereof.

138 **The Spiritual Ascent**

So albeit we have not any one particular virtue whereby we may fight down vainglory, yet are upgoings to overcome it most needful; and let the first step and ascent against it be this, that a man strive with all his might not to begin anything with an intention to vainglory: that he keep guard over his mouth that he speak not aught so as to gain praise, especially with the intention or forethought of so gaining it. In like manner let him beware of acting in such a way as to gain special praise or prominence, and so forth; and he doth climb this step warily if he doth earnestly ruminate in his heart this thought, that what thing soever he hath begun and carried out with such an intention shall not only bring him no reward, but shall even get him great punishment. Wherefore let him diligently consider this word: "Amen, I say unto you, they have received their reward"; and likewise this verse of the psalm: "When GOD hath scattered the bones of them that please men they are put to confusion because GOD hath despised them," and this: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of CHRIST."

The second ascent is that as a man must be careful not to do his good deeds so as to be seen of men, or to be conspicuous before them, so also let him beware lest vainglory mar his sacrifice, by joining herself to him in the midst thereof; and let him always be forward to embrace those things in which he may be oppressed and lightly entreated, putting aside those from which glory and honour may arise.

Yet vainglory, to the end that through deceit she may drag one back from this ascent, doth often cheat him by fraud, and not by violence, that is, she doth sometimes suggest that a great

The Ascents against Pride 139

thing should be undertaken, pretending that it is done through zeal for GOD, not with a zeal to glory. For example, that a man take upon him the office of preaching, and the order either of priest or deacon, that he may be able to win souls for the LORD and show to others a pattern of an exemplary life; yet this desire is vain and must be cast out, for by this very thing a man is made unworthy of such an office, namely, that he is inclined thereto of desire. Wherefore the blessed Gregory saith: "He who being called to the priesthood doth hold back, and being sought therefor doth shrink away, that man should be promoted to serve at the holy altar, and in like manner he that doth seek it of his own motion, or doth thrust himself forward importunately ought without doubt to be rejected. Consider the notable example of a certain man who was deceived by this ill suggestion, that is given in Cassianus, his eleventh book of the *Institutes of Monks*.

The third ascent is lofty, and not many do climb up thereto, but it is this: when a man hath blown out the lamp of vanity and overthrown it, he doth so greatly love lowliness and contempt of the world that sometimes, even in the face of the multitude, he will do or undertake something whose fulfilment shall bring abject ignominy, and that for love of lowliness and a desire to be held in light esteem.

¶ Chapter LXIII. Of the ascents whereby we should war against pride.

NOW at the very last it is needful to set in order steps to reach the throne where pride hath her seat, and thence to hurl down that queen of vices, even as queen Jezebel was

hurled headlong. But one must ascend hither by means of the steps of humility, and of these the first doth consist in this, that a man know in very truth that he is weak, incapable of good, vicious and deficient in other regards, and that he exalt not himself above himself; but if overcome of temptation he hath sometimes done so that he reprove and chastise himself. But a two-fold pride doth strive to drag the climber back from this step, namely, pride carnal and pride spiritual: the first deceiveth him by suggesting that he is better than he really is because of his learning, his riches, the rank of his parents, or something of like nature, and this pride will not suffer him truly to know himself and his own worthlessness; and the signs by which thou canst recognize carnal pride in thyself or in another are these, according to Cassianus: First of all, loudness in speech, then sourness when silent, abundant and excessive laughter in moods of joy, sullenness that is beyond reason in moods of gravity, rancour in reproof; such pride is easy of speech and her words break forth everywhere without any weightiness of purpose, she doth lack all patience, knoweth not charity, is bold to show contempt but cowardly to bear it, slow to obey and haughty at receiving reproof, but weak in cutting off her own will and ever striveth to set up her own standard; also she is become unable to take counsel, that is to say, in all things she doth trust her own rather than her elders' counsel.

But to the end that thou mayest ascend to the aforesaid steps of humility by thrusting down carnal pride, it is needful first of all that with the inmost affection of thine heart thou show true humility to thy brethren, not con-

The Ascents against Pride 141

senting to hurt or to sadden them in aught. Secondly, that thou exercise thyself continually in lowly works and contemptible offices; as, for example, service in the kitchen and the menial offices that must be filled, such as sweeping the house, washing the dishes, and always going clad in humble and abject wise like a beggar and so forth. Likewise use an humble bearing and lowly speech, choose the lowest place, avoid boastful titles as to be called Rabbi, or Sir, choosing nothing that hath to do with boastfulness. Ever have before thine eyes the hour of thy death, for when these and like things have become matters of use, they incline the mind to lowliness and hinder it that it be not puffed up.

But pride of the spirit is different, for it doth make the mind to swell and lifteth her above herself, as it were, by the many virtues and great merits which she doth claim and boast herself to have in a special degree, thinking that these virtues were either given her of GOD or come of her own deserts. Now this is far more perilous than carnal vices, for there is no one of these last which doth so drain out all virtues, and so despoil and strip a man bare of all righteousness and sanctity as this evil of pride; yea, and its wont is to hurl down and slay in utter ruin them that were set upon the very housetop of the virtues. But that thou mayest stop this inward swelling and climb up to the step of humility aforesaid, it is needful that in all thy virtues, in all thy progress and in all thy good works, thou say and feel, both from the bottom of thine heart and with thy lips: "Not I; but the grace of GOD that is with me; by the grace of GOD I am what I am: it is GOD that worketh both to will and to do according to His good pleasure." Also diligently consider

thine own worthlessness and earnestly weigh this, namely, that the good qualities of thy mind are not thine own, but the gift of God, and of them shalt thou give an account. But thine evil qualities are thy very own, and they are altogether evil, grievous by reason of many circumstances and worthy of most grievous punishment. But our good qualities are not altogether good, being in many regards imperfect; negligence, lukewarmness, hypocrisy, vainglory and so forth, often do so greatly stifle the good that is ours, that such good qualities are little meritorious and little accepted of God.

Likewise thou must often give heed to others that are higher and better than thou, both men and also the LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who saith: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart," thus by comparing thyself with others thou wilt esteem thyself lightly. But when a man hath continued so doing for some while, he doth begin to know himself truly what he is, and if he doth exercise himself in his affections after this manner, and doth so continue steadfastly, thenceforth he doth begin to put on an affection of such a nature that, as in the first ascent he perceived himself to be worthless, useless and so forth, so also now he would desire, so far as in him lieth, to be so considered by others, or even more worthless rather than better than he really is, unless, indeed, such reputation might cause scandal to his neighbour; and this is the second ascent and the second step of humility. But the third step and ascent is when a man who hath put on such an affection to humility by means of lowly exercises and knowledge of the truth, is not exalted even by great virtues and lofty gifts, nor doth flatter himself at all because of them,

Of the Spiritual Descents 143

but doth attribute and assign them wholly to Him from Whom he hath received all his good gifts; of such nature was the humility of CHRIST, and such that of the angels and of the saints in glory.

¶ Chapter LXIV. Here beginneth the fourth part, which concerneth the spiritual descents, which are divided into two: the first the descent to one-self, the second that to one's neighbour.

NOW hast thou heard, O man, the descents by which thou hast gone downward, that is to say thou hast heard how thou oughtest to order upgoings in thine heart, by what exercises and steps thou canst go up, how that thy task is to implore the aid of GOD by devout prayer, and what manner of reward thou shalt receive in another place. These are the things that were set before thee in the beginning, but Holy Scripture doth speak in another place of these upgoings, saying: "Jacob saw a ladder set up and the angels of GOD ascending and descending upon it"; wherefore perhaps thou dost marvel in that the angels upon the ladder, and holy men in like manner, do descend, for it is no marvel that they should go upward. And yet this matter may be understood without absurdity, because even holy men, so long as they are sojourners and are weighed down by the body which is corrupted, cannot ascend continually and without check so as never to falter in their upward way, seeing that they are laden with the weight of corruption, nor can they but go down by times through relaxing their spiritual exercises.

Again, there are descents profitable and even of advantage to the purpose, by the which even they that are truly climbers on the upward way,

144 **The Spiritual Ascent**

and men that are spiritual may sometimes break their ascent for a while, undertaking such backward steps as may be profitable to themselves. But in order that thou mayest understand what are these descents, I say that there are two, the one by which a man goeth downward to himself, and a second by which he goeth downward to his neighbour. And each one of these is subdivided into three steps.

¶ Chapter LXV. Of the first descent by which a man goeth down, out of regard for himself, from an higher to a lower step.

FIRST then a man goeth down to himself, and this is an example of such descent. A man who is set upon an higher ascent and hath been carried upward to a loftier step, doth on occasion go downward to the end that he may exercise himself yet more perfectly upon a lower stage, because he feareth he shall lose what he gained in the lower stages if he climb ever upward. For a man that is going upward ought not to reach forward to the things that are before in such a manner as never to know in his heart the need of looking back to the things that are behind; but he must reach forward and go on from virtue to virtue in such a way as never to be heedless of the steps to which he hath already come, and by which he hath climbed upward, and in such a way as to be zealous in keeping with all his might what he hath already attained. For example, thou hast been smitten with compunction through fear, through meditating on death, the last judgement and the pains of hell; thou hast done much good thereby and art come in the next place to hope; then through the remembrance of the joy of heaven and the goodness of

GOD thou didst stir thyself in sweeter wise to the compunction of love; oughtest thou then to leave fear? Shouldest thou altogether put behind thee all meditations on death and the judgement? I trow not; nay sometimes thou must ascend by hope to the higher, and gaze on the glory of heaven that thou mayest be enticed by the beauty thereof to climb yet higher; but anon thou must descend again by the step of fear, and study yet more earnestly than before the vanity of the world, the shortness of thy life and the bitterness of the pains of hell; for so shalt thou be adread to descend lower yet; so shall hope go before and draw thee upward while fear is behind urging thee, as with a goad, to go forward and climb higher; so in all thine exercises and at all times thou shalt ascend and descend treading the steps of fear, hope, and charity, till charity herself is made all perfect, driving forth fear, that is the fear lest thou fall into torpor, false security, or presumption. Thus it is that the angels and holy men do ascend to heaven through affection and desire thereto, and of set purpose descend into the abyss, or go down alive into the pit. But concerning the step upon which a man ought to exercise himself more fully, discretion must needs be used so as to discriminate herein according to the progress, state and condition of each several person; yet in thine ascent and in thy descent, thou shalt, like Mary who was a sinner, embrace both feet of CHRIST; so like the prophet thou shalt sing of mercy and judgement to the LORD.

Now all things that are in the Scriptures, according to Augustine, have reference to these two ascents and descents; for the former are made that thou mayest love God's mercy,

the latter that thou mayest fear His power; wherefore the holy prophet in his divine speech doth tell how he heard of these two only. "God spake once," saith he, "and these two things have I heard, that mercy is to Thee, O LORD, and thou dost recompense every man according to his work"; all the prophets, all the Holy Scriptures are concerned with these two things. Hear the blessed Gregory as he doth commend to thee this ascent and descent. "Albeit," saith he, "that fear may always seem to be far removed from safety, yet is nothing safer for a man than constant fear tempered with hope, for this doth hinder the imprudent mind from hurling herself into vice through desperation, or from falling to ruin through exultation in her gifts; for the more humbly, and yet hopefully, the mind doth tremble for herself before the eyes of the strict but loving Judge, the more firmly doth she stand." If, therefore, thou art not willing that the foot of pride come against thee (for by this all who work iniquity do fall) then be slow to withdraw thy foot altogether from fear.

¶ Chapter LXVI. Of the second descent by which a man must go down by times to learn discipline in his outward conduct and bearing.

IN the second place, O man, thou must go down to thyself and order and arrange thine outward man duly in the matter of conduct, that thine inward devotion and holiness of heart may shine forth outwardly in thy bearing and behaviour. Wherefore rule thine outward manners that thou mayest keep guard over thyself, be an ensample to others and amiable to all. This wilt thou accomplish in most excellent wise if thou study to observe these things in thine out-

Of the Second Descent 147

ward bearing, first, that it be staid; secondly, humble; third, benignant; for of these the first doth make thee a pattern for others, the next watchful over thyself, the last lovable to all.

Now to be staid lieth in this, that a man show not levity in running about, be not prone to laughter nor curious, nor chattersome, nor a jester. Staidness doth rule the head, inwardly composeth the mind, and outwardly doth guard the whole body from insolence. It ruleth the head, I say, because it doth hinder it from lightly turning hither and thither, the eyes from wandering, the ears from curious listening and so on with each matter. An humble bearing doth bow her neck, maketh answer in low tones and doth smooth the gestures. She doth love simple vesture, taketh her place amongst the lowest, refuseth every mark of ostentation, doth flee singularity and maketh a man quick and prompt to serve his fellows. Benevolence maketh him affable and compassionate to the afflicted; tractable, easy to be entreated and readily bent to follow command, eager to impart of his own self and his possessions for a good end, cheerful and modest, pleasant, faithful and compassionate, kindly and beneficent. But this virtue of benevolence is needful for them that live together as a company in so far as it is concerned with certain outward signs of kindness which the philosopher calleth Friendship. "No man," saith he, "can live from day to day with one that is sour and hath naught that is pleasant in him," and verily thou art constrained by a duty of natural uprightness to live with others showing that pleasantness that cometh of benignity. Wherefore thou oughtest to wear a kindly and pleasant manner, especially when thou art with others,

148 The Spiritual Ascent

and where many are assembled together it doth befit thee to cloak sadness of heart with a certain cheerfulness of countenance.

Yet over-abundant laxity should be avoided, lest the vice of vanity be nurtured by the pretext of goodness to others. Therefore, saith Hugo: "When thou art in company with others, and it please you that ye confer one with another, let your speech be of conduct or of the Scriptures; now let us sigh for the miseries of this present life, now rejoice together over the hope of joy to come, now refresh our hearts by revealing to each other the hidden things that each doth know, now sigh together for the vision of JESUS and the good things that are in heaven." But if it be profitable sometimes to relax the tension of our minds by turning to lower things and pleasant thoughts, let such unbendings be thoroughly honest, free from levity, and though they lack an overweight of gravity yet let them not want edification.

In these three things therefore, namely, staidness, humility and benignity, lieth thine outward discipline of character; humility doth temper staidness lest she seem puffed up, and benignity doth hinder her that she look not austere or graceless.

¶ Chapter LXVII. The third descent, so far as it referreth to oneself. In this a man must needs exercise himself in the labour of his hands, seeing that for his frailty he cannot always nor long continue in spiritual exercises.

IN the third place thou must often choose, as thou makest thine ascent, some bodily or manual labour; nay, verily, thou must so order thine exercises that thou train thyself every day and

Of the Third Descent 149

at set times in manual toil, and also at their own set times make progress in the upgoings of thine heart, although perhaps thou shalt not be hindered from making this progress even whilst thou dost labour with thine hands. For thou canst pray, meditate and exercise thyself in fear and desires whiles thou art at labour; our holy fathers had this for their rule, for they did trust that the more faithfully they gave themselves to labouring with their hands, so much the greater would be their progress in attaining the heights of purity, charity and spiritual perfection. Wherefore, O man, seeing that thou art frail, think not thyself an angel (for these have a spiritual food which thou knowest not), so as to desire continually to cleave to the things of the spirit, but at set times exercise thyself with the labour of thine hands, and this for a multitude of reasons.

In the first place, lest thou utterly give up all spiritual exercises, being overcome of weariness, for think not thyself to be more fervent and spiritual than the great Saint Anthony who would have returned to the world being thus overcome save that he learned from an angel so to ascend and descend, in this wise dividing his time between bodily and spiritual work. Moreover, the opinion of Cassianus is this, that he who is not content to do some manual labour every day cannot persevere to the end in the cell.

The second reason is this: that although to some small degree such toil may withdraw thee from leisure for contemplation, yet will it make thee more able for it afterward; for, as thou hast heard, a man cannot make the ascent while his lusts are yet with him, but these are the very things that hinder his upgoing. Wherefore it doth behove thee to overcome these lusts, and especi-

150 **The Spiritual Ascent**

ally by manual toil, because every idle man is tempted of desire. Thus manual labour doth subserve the spiritual ascent in proportion as it doth remove the obstacles thereto. In the third place thine heart is very unstable, and as a little boat is tossed hither and thither in the waves of the sea, so is the heart shaken by divers affections and thoughts. Therefore, as saith Cassianus, "It doth beseech thee to make fast thine heart, as with an anchor, that is, with the weight or occupation of manual toil."

Fourthly, because the enemy findeth more doors whereby to let in temptation when we are idle than when we are busied; and verily, as men say: "He that is busy is tempted by one fiend only, but an idler is harried by fiends innumerable."

Fifthly, if thou dost diligently consider it, the work of thine hands giveth thee profitable admonishment for thine upward way, teaching thee firstly of the place in which God set thee, but from which thou art fallen; for when thou wast set there in the fullness of peace, it did not beseech thee to labour, and if Adam was placed there, as saith the Scripture, to till Paradise, yet then he needed not toil, but tilled it with all delight, and perceiving in the lower creatures the power, wisdom and kindness of the Creator, he was led to praise Him.

Sixthly as Bernard saith: "The labour of the hands is as a binding up of the wounds wherewith thou art corrected and admonished for sin." For, indeed, it was after the fall that the precept of the natural law was given, namely, "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat thy bread." So then as often as thou labourest with thine hands, so often art thou admonished con-

Of the Third Descent 151

cerning the fall of transgression ; and likewise that thou must work for six days, that is all the lifetime that thou livest here, for this is the time of toil; but on the seventh day, when this present life is ended, the Spirit shall bid thee rest from thy labours. Thus art thou admonished by such toil to reach out to that place where it shall not be needful for thee to labour, for there thy task shall be only to be at rest and behold the LORD, how kind He is. Furthermore, the labour of the hands doth make thee free, so that there is no need for thee to praise others, or desire aught that they have, as the Apostle doth write to the Thessalonians.

Seventhly, as saith Bernard, this same labour doth often as it were press down the body by its weight and mass, and so sometimes expresseth a sweeter essence of compunction and maketh it purer. For these and many other reasons it was that our Holy Fathers, especially those in Egypt, did labour so faithfully, and for this are they so highly extolled by the saints.

But to the end that thou depart not far from the upgoings of thine heart, thou oughtest always to choose, so far as in thee lieth, such kinds of bodily labour as seem to have a greater affinity to spiritual exercises, as, for instance, the writing of holy books, for this is a lesser impediment to thine ascent, and more fruitful in the things of the spirit. For as many holy books as thou writest, so many heralds of the truth as it were dost thou create, and as many men that are smitten with compunction and profited thereby, so many are the merits of which thou art a partaker, and for this cause it is that the blessed Bernard doth approve the work of writing more than other labours; many of the Holy Fathers

were writers; all the brothers and disciples in the monastery of St Martin did write, and the blessed Jerome doth specially admonish the monk Rusticus about this task amongst others, and divers saints both for lowliness' sake and for the avoidance of idleness did write their books with their own hands, as we read was the custom of Ambrose and Jerome. But verily when thou toilest with thine hands, thou must not be idle of mind, but exercise thyself to piety of heart by saying some prayer, by meditating, or, indeed, sweetly ruminating what thou writest; yea, as saith Augustine, in speaking of the work of monks, thou mayest sing some holy chant over thy work; and such a thing would not hinder thy toil any more than the songs which they of the world sing over the work of their hands do hinder that work; but they must toil faithfully, not as worldlings who receive only wages that pass away, for thou dost earn not a temporal wage alone but also a fadeless crown in heaven.

Consider this, that the holy angels did specially announce the birth of CHRIST the LORD to shepherds who were busied with their toil. But do not thou be too intent or eager over thy work, but moderate and discreet; above all things thou oughtest to keep silence over thy task, for silence, according to the prophet, is that in which our strength lieth; and if it be a thing to keep everywhere and always, save when necessity may compel, or utility urge us, so also it must be specially observed during our toil, as saith the Apostle: "We beseech you in the LORD JESUS that ye eat your bread with silence."

Of Descents for one's Neighbour 153

¶ Chapter LXVIII. Of the descents in regard to, or on behalf of, one's neighbour; of which the first is made at the bidding of our Superior.

IN like manner it is often necessary to come down from these ascents for one's neighbour's sake, that is, one must cease awhile from the upward way, but not desert it altogether; but there are three ways in which we descend for our neighbour's sake, for it may be done because of our superior, because of our equal, or because of our inferior. Thou must descend, I say, because of thy superior; for example, it may be that thou dost desire to be still so far as in thee lieth, like Lazarus to mourn over thy sins and to make perfect thy compunction by the remembrance of them and of the last judgement and so forth; or else thou dost desire, like Mary, to sit at JESUS' feet as He preacheth, that is to exercise thyself in thy mind upon the life and Passion of CHRIST, or upon something else which is a mighty step on the upward way. But lo, thy superior cometh and calleth thee, he doth bid thee go forth, and commandeth thee to descend; then let Martha delay not to fall at the feet of the vicar of JESUS, that is the said superior; and to fall at his feet is this, namely, with all humility and devout readiness to descend and turn one's inclinations from the inward exercise; but if Mary should abide still in the house, being occupied only with that inward devotion from which Martha was unwillingly torn away, in that case, I say, even though Mary sat at JESUS' feet, Martha would murmur, yea, even if Mary be weeping for her brother, Martha must of necessity go into the inner house (that is to say, thou must go into the inner man) and call her in low tones (that is to say, secretly chide thyself) and say to her: "The Master is

come, and calleth for thee," that is, "He to whose charge thou hast committed thyself, namely, thy superior, doth call and bid thee go forth, for till now thou art sitting still. Surely thy vocation is not better than the devout fulfilment of the law of obedience." Hearing this word, let Mary arise and in like manner fall at Jesus' feet, saying: "My heart is ready; my heart is ready, ready for quiet contemplation at Thy command, but ready also to minister in things external, if Thou bid me do so." Not only art thou bound so to do at the bidding of thy father, but also it ought to be done out of charity when a brother doth exhort thee thereto; for the Holy Fathers readily put off their exercises that they might be able to preserve obedience inviolate; and also they thought this came above all things, namely, to follow not their own but another's will.

Moreover, although obedience to a command or to a need is more binding, do not thou curiously consider whether thou art bound or not, for often to obey out of charity is more meritorious, and obedience fulfilled in devotion doth increase charity.

¶ Chapter LXIX. Concerning the second descent in regard to our neighbour, by the which we do condescend to him, by giving either aid, counsel, admonition or correction.

IN the second place thou must descend in regard to thy neighbour, and condescend to him, being moved thereto by compassion and piety; thou must aid him with help and counsel, for instance, thou must assist them that are afflicted in the body and succour them, but much more if thou seest them afflicted in the spirit, admonishing them so far as thou canst, correcting

Of Descents for one's Neighbour 155

them, drawing them, giving them counsel and comfort when they are tempted and troubled; for save that Paul had come down from the third Heaven, and descending from his lofty exaltation of mind had inclined him to the weaker, he would have drawn no man; but he did so descend being made all things to all men; to carnal men preached he JESUS, and Him crucified; but to spiritual men he added further spiritual things; so also do thou be all things to all men, succouring each one as his need may demand. If bodily infirmity doth weigh down any, give them hearty compassion and freely minister to them so far as thou canst, especially to those that are of the household. If poverty doth bind them, give to the sufferers if thou canst, and succour them even if thou bearest penury awhile, that like the widow's mite thine offering may be not of thy superfluity but of thy living; and that thou mayest help others out of thine own poverty and the lack thou sufferest in food, clothing and the like.

But if thou canst not relieve them in goods, at least do so with pious admonishment, for a good word is better than the best gift, and the alms of the spirit than alms of the body; wherefore above all things if thou thyself, standing on the higher steps of the heart, seest some below thee wandering from the yoke of CHRIST, descend with all speed, and leave thine ascent (if it seem expedient so to do for the time), draw these men to thee, admonish and correct them; say not in thine heart: "Mine own salvation is sufficient for me; I would be solicitous for myself, not for another; am I indeed his superior? Have I been set as his keeper?" Nay, zeal for good begetteth not thoughts like these; but, as saith the blessed

156 **The Spiritual Ascent**

Gregory, "In proportion as thou hast received grace to aspire to the things that are on high, so do thou call thy neighbour back from depravity. Announce to him that wandereth, after the manner above set forth, the eternal kingdom, or punishment eternal, that so thou shalt deserve to be called an angel."

Thus administer to each the word of admonition as may seem to thee expedient for his need. Consider, as said Bede, that no converse between men can be more lofty or more pleasing to God than that of those who drive themselves from vice, and subdue their minds to the study of virtue. Beside this, such men do strive by daily exercise to turn others to the grace of their Maker, and by the constant gathering together of faithful souls to increase the joy of their country in Heaven. But we must not understand this to mean public preaching, but to have reference to private admonition and brotherly exhortation, for this is meant by the saying: "God hath given commandment to each one concerning his neighbour."

Public preaching ought not to be undertaken by any man, especially the young, save in great moderation, unless those who preach are as it were filled with virtue and grace like a flask which runneth not over except it be first quite full, as Bernard saith in his comment on the Canticles.

Truly it is a hard and perilous thing that he who hath but a little oil should pour it forth to the end that he may seem to love others more than himself, and not to act against the law of charity; perilous, I say, unless he poureth his oil as the prophet bids us.

In like manner, being moved thereto by the

Of Descents for one's Neighbour 157

spirit of gentleness, and having compassion on thy brother, thou must descend when thou seest another committing sin, or ruling himself disorderly, no matter how thou dost perceive it; do this that by condescending to him in pious wise thou mayest be able, through brotherly correction, to draw him higher and lead him to amendment. So far as in thee lieth, thou must not suffer vice to reign in anyone, but compassion with lowliness must go before, and moderate zeal with discretion must eat thee up, so that thou cease not to reproach a sinner whensoever thou dost reckon that there is a chance of amendment.

Again, ever give heed to thyself, lest thou also be tempted, and so, as saith Bernard, let that zeal burn within us, most beloved, with love of justice and hatred of iniquity. Let none pamper his brother's vice, and none hide his sins, nor say: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Let no man bear it lightly that his order perish, nor that discipline be relaxed, so far as lieth in him to hinder these things. But thou oughtest so to succour thy neighbour as to give him material alms if he have lack in the body, and freely to expend pity and aid of the spirit upon him, if he need spiritual help. Secondly, thou must assist him with thy counsel, instructing and directing him that erreth, specially in temptation and in matters concerning spiritual exercises, yet look to it that thou teach not others what thou knowest not thyself, for it is better humbly to confess ignorance than presumptuously to be ready to teach; wherefore let thy counsel ever be consonant with Holy Scripture. As concerning those counsels which thou dost receive or lay down in advising another, if they be private matters take

heed lest thou publish them abroad, especially such as concern other men's temptations; from this come many perils as is said in the Second Conference of the Fathers.

In giving counsel beware lest thou follow thine own passion or inclination, for this doth prevent judgement, and zeal knoweth not discretion. Likewise before thou dost give any counsel, and especially if it be in a hard matter, deliberate some while, speak not that which may first come to mind, but be mature of judgement, ever giving thy counsel with submission to the opinion of others, lest thou be found too pertinacious; also desire thyself to consent to lowly men rather than to gain their assent. For this cause thou oughtest not to make light of the counsel of any, for God doth often reveal to little ones what he hideth from the wise; but do thou give ear to the counsels of all men, not, indeed, straightway receiving it, but prove all things, as saith the Apostle, and whatsoever may be good, that hold fast in humility and give unchanging consent thereto.

¶ Chapter LXX. Of the third descent by which it is needful that a superior go down, through care and solicitude for those that are set under him.

BUT if thou hast others under thee, then doth it behove thee to go down much further and more often, yea, thou must very often leave thine upward path so as to have leisure to keep them that are set under thee in ward and discipline; in ward, I say, meaning that thou keep safe in their worthy conversation them that are standing; in discipline, that thou correct them that are wandering, or them whose conversation is

Of Descents for one's Neighbour 159

less well ordered. For be assured that otherwise the LORD shall require at thine hands the blood of those souls that were set under thee, and save that so far as in thee lieth thou dost bring with thee thy littlest brother thou shalt not see the face of Joseph, that is, of thy true Saviour. Consider here how perilous is the condition of a superior, seeing that it is needful that such a man desert himself, and by this neglect he doth often lose himself; for because such an one is greatly busied outwardly and is idle inwardly, he doth sometimes neglect his upgoings, descendeth to an hard heart, becometh insensible because he perceiveth outward things only, and hath no taste for the things of the spirit, as Bernard hath well shewn in his first book on *Contemplation*.

Wherefore, so far as in thee lieth, take the counsel of the saints, avoiding the condition of a superior and too great outward occupation, save in so far as thou must always show an humble and prompt obedience.

But when a man is constrained to obey a call to outward occupations he ought very anxiously to strive, whensoever he can or whensoever he hath time to do so, to return to inward things and to be at leisure for his own soul, lest, as hath been said, he become lacking in sensibility. For this cause, saith Saint Gregory, "Holy men who are constrained by the necessity of their office to serve outward ministries do always eagerly take refuge in the secret places of the heart and there climb up to the mountain top of inward contemplation; there, being as it were set upon an hill, they see the law of the LORD; whilst putting behind them the tumult of their temporal acts they so search out the sentence of

160 The Spiritual Ascent

the Heavenly Will, looking down from the peak of their contemplation. But to the end that they may perform their outward ministrations without offence, they must constantly return to the secret places of the heart."

**Here endeth the devout treatise
of Gerard of Zutphen, concerning
Spiritual Ascents.**

CONCERNING four things in which they who are beginning to serve God must be cautious if they would make progress.

THERE be four things in which the young and they that are beginners must be cautious if they would make progress. The first is that they grow not lukewarm nor depart from that good will with which they came into the Religious life, nor from the first fervour of their novitiate, for this is the reproach of one in the Apocalypse: "I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first Charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and do penance, and do the first works."

Now they leave their first charity who, though at first they are fervent and devout toward all things, yet afterward do become lukewarm and slothful; they give themselves up to levity, and allow those vices, which they came to drive out, to have the dominion over them, serving GOD according to their own desire not according to the good pleasure of His Will. For this cause the LORD gave this precept to the Children of Israel, "Remember that day in which ye went forth from Egypt"; now the day on which we do go forth from Egypt doth mean the good will by the which we are led out of the world, and this we must always remember that we never depart from the fervour thereof; thus it was that one who desired to leave the world and enter the Religious life asked a certain holy father how he ought to live; and the father replied to him:

M

“See what manner of man thou wast on the first day, and continue ever to live as such.” That is, consider the condition of thy will on that first day on which thou didst determine to enter the Religious life; see how humble thou wast, how ready to be obedient in everything, undertaking hard and mean tasks; how patient of correction, penury and toil; how modest and fearful; how zealous to amend thy life and to recover the days which thou didst lose in the world; how little thou didst care to seek out or tell the rumours of the world, for thou wert not set on detraction nor occupied with any curious matters; think how thou didst flee from and cast away all carnal affections and acts, offering thyself wholly to God, a living burnt-offering, so that henceforth naught of the life of sin could live in thee but that all might be slain and sacrificed to the LORD with the sword of obedience through the ministry of the priest (i.e., thy superior), to the end that thou mightest rise again, with CHRIST renewed in thee.

Strive to live for ever after according to this model, lest otherwise thou seem to be unlearning and going backward in the school of religion rather than making progress. For they who go to a school for study and return homeward having spent their time in vain, can count up only wasted expenses, for one cannot see wherein they have profited; we also are like them when we count up the time spent in the Religious life and our progress in virtue doth appear but small, since perchance we were more devout and fervent in our novitiate than now after many years.

But this is most shameful and very hurtful, as is said in the fifth chapter of the Hebrews, for when ye ought to be masters of virtue because

of the long time that ye have been in the religious life ye require to be taught again what are the very elements of the beginning of the Word of God; that is, ye have need to be taught, like unskilled novices, how one ought to begin to serve Him, and ye are become as those who need milk and not solid food, that is, ye are of like kind with them who must be fostered with the soft blandishments of childish and carnal consolation, not being strong enough to bear the manly exercises of virtue in hard reprehension and contumely, in necessity and in persecution for CHRIST's sake. For every one that is a partaker of milk is untaught in the language of uprightness being a babe alike in merit and in virtue.

The second thing is that a man must be cautious as to the person at whose instigation he doth begin, lest he be moved by the ill example of lukewarm men to follow their pattern; for in this way some who are weak in spirit, seeing others round them that are slothful in the service of GOD, idle and talkative, puffed up and rebellious, filled with ambition and vicious in other ways, do say in regard to themselves, "If this is allowed to others, why not to me?" Thus do they become more apt for evil, taking their pattern from those whom they see to be worse; and they rejoice that they have found comrades in evil, lest they be made to blush by being alone in their ill ways, because if others are spared hardships they wish to be spared also in like things. Now the devout servant of GOD ought to answer on his part as against this, saying, "I came here simply for GOD's sake, and not for aught else, wherefore I will not follow any man in such fashion as to draw back from Him; but

had I known that those here were so greatly different I would never have chosen their companionship. For this cause I ought to follow them only who will inform me in those things for whose sake I entered the Religious life, namely, to apprehend GOD, to make satisfaction for my sins and gain glory eternal." The painter or sculptor that would make a notable work seeketh no models save the best that he can have; the traveller asketh not the way from the ignorant, but from them that know it and have walked often thereby; and, assaith John, "Do not imitate evil, but good." The third thing is that a man must be careful not to be over-bold in judging the deeds of others, particularly when he knoweth not for what cause nor with what intention these be done, for just as we see not the thoughts of others, so, also, we know not their intentions nor wherefore this or that is done. So if an act may be excused in any way, let us always interpret it in the better sense, that is if we would have an heart at peace with ourselves and with others, desiring not to disturb them nor to offend GOD: for we do often judge a thing to be evil which in itself is not so, and by our over-boldness we sin, usurping to ourselves the judgement of the secrets of the heart, which judgement belongeth to GOD. Our masters, who are in the place of GOD, sometimes may judge thus by piecing together the conditions of an act, but it is not expedient that others should be judged by us, until, being fully taught in all things through the gift of discerning spirits and being made truly spiritual, we are able to judge all things and to be judged of none; just so is one that seeth clearly and looketh on a blind man, for he is not seen of the blind man, nor may this last see himself; as saith that text in the

fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, "Who art thou that judgest thy fellow-servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."

Often they who are over-bold to judge another deserve to be suffered to fall into like or heavier excesses, that they may learn from their own weakness to have compassion on that of another; as is said in the sixth chapter of Saint Luke, "Judge not that ye be not judged, for with what iudgement ye judge shall ye be judged."

The fourth thing in which novices must be careful is this, namely, that they be not broken down by adversity or temptation; but let them think of the reasons that led them hither, so that they may bear for GOD's sake all things which can happen to them in this life. In like manner, he that goeth into the battle knoweth that he ought not to look for quiet and delight, but rather for toil and wounds, as is said in the fourteenth chapter of Acts, "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of GOD"; and in the last chapter of Saint Luke it is said, "It behoveth CHRIST to suffer and so enter into His glory."

Praise be to God.



Notes

Page 2, line 12.—"In which GOD did of old place man and create him" is an alternative reading which may clarify the sense.

Page 49, line 16.—Similarly for the words: "In the Bread and Wine" read, "Under the appearances of Bread and Wine."

Page 55, line 31.—"Carnal," meaning natural rather than supernatural.

Page 71, line 14.—The words "do rather withdraw themselves," suggest a reference to the modern pronouncements of the Holy See on the subject of Frequent Communion.

Page 116, line 8.—"These are the *eight* . . ." We now commonly reckon the Deadly Sins to be *seven* in number.

11

FEB 8 '68

~~APR 20 1975~~

~~MAY 28 1975~~

JAN 20 1976

~~10L due 831113~~ P.D.

ZERBOLT, Gerard
The spiritual ascent

770.5
Z58 sp
1908

